Provenance

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Provenance

by drinkbloodlikewine, whiskeyandspite

Summary

Will blinks, slow. He glances to either side of himself, past exposed brick and reclaimed wooden floors, past steel fittings holding up tables marked 'no laptops' with carefully calligraphed signs and the wiry bulbs burning dim in light fixtures above. He looks at the young man behind him, who doesn't notice past his phone and his earbuds, and finally Will turns back to the barista.

Baristo?

Coffee-monger?

Fuck it.

"Just coffee," Will repeats again, slower.

A delightful AU about a rare book dealer, an owner of a high-end coffee shop, and murder. This does involve Hannibal Lecter, after all.

Notes

A story for the lovely trythisoutchiki who asked for a coffee shop AU with a twist. We really hope you like it bb!

Muchos kudos to Noodle for being the best beta ever!

Chapter 1

There really isn't any choice.

Will didn't sleep last night. No, he thinks, that's not entirely correct. He did sleep. He slept fitfully and for roughly two hours after the first threads of sun stitched across the sky. Ensconced in work, casual correspondence and bargaining both, often overlapping, he had told himself repeatedly that he'd finish one more thing and then sleep. Just another search, quickly, and then sleep. One more email, and then, and then, and then, and finally he just stopped lying to himself and sat awake until he tipped towards the computer and jerked back awake again.

Then he slept.

Poorly.

For two hours.

So it makes sense, in a way that things can make sense and still be entirely aggravating, that he would be off-step this morning. He'd fed the dogs, at least, and there's some reassurance in that, even though in doing so he forgot to feed himself or put the water on for coffee. No, he thinks again, also not *entirely* correct. He'd put the water on and forgotten about it, and by the time he remembered it was cold again and he had to leave anyway.

There really isn't any choice.

A bell jangles his nerves as he tips the door open to the coffee shop. It's the only one that meets his needs right now, primarily being that the shop has coffee, secondarily that it not be some corporate chain with abysmal business practices, and thirdly, that it's only a few blocks away from his shop. It'll do. It has to do.

The line isn't long. The fact that there is a line is already a sign in favor of this place. Demand in a place that isn't a franchise means good coffee, or good service, or good anything, at the very least. So he waits in line, steps up as those before him do, eyes to his shoes, then to his phone as it hums with yet another email.

By the time he is at the counter he has a headache from frowning, has planned two appointments in the next two hours and the sound in the cafe is doing his head in. Someone nearby is chewing too loudly.

"Coffee," he says tersely, flicks his eyes up over the rims of his glasses to the man serving him and does a brief double take. Not a pimple-speckled kid paying at least some way through college - art school, in this part of town - but a man in his late 30s, well-dressed and well-groomed, and smiling in a way that is entirely too -

It's not a smile, for starters, his mouth isn't tilted into a smile, but Will can tell, he can *feel* the smile from him.

It’s unnerving.

“Just a coffee,” he repeats.

“Specificity is not the most common attribute to sleepless night owls, but have you a preference? Or is the smell of coffee keeping you standing enough?”

Will blinks, slow. He glances to either side of himself, past exposed brick and reclaimed wooden floors, past steel fittings holding up tables marked ‘no laptops’ with carefully calligraphed signs and the wiry bulbs burning dim in light fixtures above. He looks at the young man behind him, who doesn’t notice past his phone and his earbuds, and finally Will turns back to the barista.

Baristo?

Coffee-monger?

Fuck it.

“Just coffee,” Will repeats again, slower. And he knows he’s being rude, so with irritation - towards himself, mostly - he shakes his head and pushes his glasses up his nose again, adjusting the bag across his shoulder. “Ah, drip. The - you know. The pot. Please. I don’t need anything else in it -”

He hasn’t lifted his gaze again, but it lingers a little lower still to the neatly printed list of drinks and their prices.

“That can’t be right.”

The man clicks his tongue quietly as he reaches for a cup, heavy and a green so dark it’s almost black. Will parts his lips to ask for it to take away when he notices that there isn’t that option here. Apparently. He wonders if it’s too late to just go somewhere else. If anywhere else will have anything remotely resembling anything but dirty dishwater with caramel sauce.

“There isn’t anything listed for drip,” Will says at last.

“Because we do not offer that as an option,” the barista replies, head tilting and dark eyes narrowing in that strange not-smile again that sets Will’s teeth on edge. “Coffee should be brewed. Properly tended. And properly enjoyed.”

“And for people in a rush?”

“Good coffee deserves the time taken to drink it, no?”

Will works his bottom lip between his teeth and holds it there. He holds it long enough that it hurts. Holds it long enough that his lungs burn from the willpower needed not to tell this well-meaning man to go fuck himself. He drums his fingers against the counter, and slowly lets loose the breath he held for long enough to make him dizzy.

He doesn't have to be to the shop for another fifteen minutes, and really, it's his shop anyway, and it opens when he says it opens. He can sit and answer email and drink his coffee here and buy a franchise sludge on his way to the shop and never come to this place again. He can be polite.

It's a personal challenge, Will tells himself. For betterment and peace of mind or some shit.

Will watches the man at work, measured movements both precise and serene. Will wonders what sick thrill he gets out of this, beyond puffing up his own ego, in not offering what people want and making them - god knows what instead. No one else seems upset about it. The line is nearly to the door behind him. It defies logic.

He draws a breath as the barista tips foamy milk into the mug, and sighs, plaintive. The beans better have been roasted by the angelic glow of the heavenly host, ground beneath Satan's hooves, and brewed through the robes of Christ himself for all of this.

"What are you even making?" Will finally asks, desperate.

"Just coffee," the man replies, a bare raising of his brow to mirror Will's tone and temperament without being at all outwardly rude. The man glances up behind Will and returns his eyes to him. "If you would like to take a seat, I will bring it out to you."

A pause, a deliberate withholding of breath again before Will releases it and leaves $15 on the counter, enough for the ridiculously overpriced whatever-the-fuck in that mug, and a tip. He moves to the seat furthest from anywhere. In the least passed and sought after spot, not near a window, closer to the kitchen, and with only one chair.

Though the line remains constant and - surprisingly - long, it is the man himself who brings the coffee - *coffee* - to Will, along with -

"Warm plum muffin with cream cheese and ginger," the man says, finally allowing his lips to tilt as he meets Will's drawn brows with a smile. "The polite early morning special."

Will glances up from his phone to take the coffee, cradling it against the device with both hands and a slight awkward shift as he sits up taller in the chair from where he'd slowly slouched. He breathes in the coffee, and starts to take a sip but regards the curious pattern formed in it with milk - leaves branching outward, like a fern - with reservation.

A blink, and he lifts his eyes upward, but not past the plate.

"No," Will says.

He receives a blink in return. "I'm sorry?"

"No," Will says again, shaking his head and blowing across his coffee, disrupting the pretty pattern in it all at once, whirlwind-frantic to finish his coffee and get the hell out. "I didn't order that, it - it must be for someone else."

A hum at that, and the man straightens, he turns as though to go, and Will exhales his relief before he speaks again.

“‘Tuesday Special, a choice of the displayed pastries with any hot beverage’.” The man recites, pointing gracefully with his right hand - surprisingly, not his left, considering he wouldn’t have to cross his body to point with his left - to the elaborately decorated and beautifully penned boards both above the counter and to the side of it. Where Will had not looked.

“Perhaps you will reconsider.” The man looks to Will again, brow up. “Those are quite the favourite.”

“You have a line,” Will points out, eyes still just past the man as he imbibes… something. There’s cinnamon in it.

“Which I will attend to momentarily. I merely enjoy seeing what new clients think of my establishment.”

It’s intended to surprise, and Will registers the feeling without any more show of it than another sip. He draws his lips into his mouth, and his brow creases.

“You’re the owner?”

“I am.”

“And you call your customers *clients*?”

The man’s smile widens, but his eyes remain a little more narrowed. “I do.”

“I mean,” Will shrugs, rolling one shoulder. “It’s a coffee shop. It’s not like you’re a doctor. But your shop, your rules.”

“And what do you make of it?” he asks. “Of my shop. And my rules.”

Will sighs, as if it might alleviate the pressure building breath by breath in his chest, as if somehow it might ease the shrinking-skin feeling of the attention paid to him, only because - he’s certain - he was rude. He takes the plate and sets it to the table, lifting his hand again after in appeasement.

“It’s fine,” he manages, almost polite. “Honestly, thank you, I’m almost done, and -”

“You’re enjoying it then.”

Will sucks his lips between his teeth, ducking his head. His patience is unraveling, thread by thread by thread. He cradles the cup with both hands, a faded taupe color now with the milk dispersed across it.

“Honestly?” Will asks, and the man arches a brow. “I didn’t ask for milk.”

The man’s expression doesn’t change beyond a brief flicker of his lower eyelids, a very slight displeasure. There is a warming victory in that, at least, for Will. The man looks like someone who is not disagreed with often, someone who is used to being told how perfect and

exceptional he is. It's almost a thrill to bring him down a few notches, if only regarding milky coffee.

Another head tilt, almost serpentine and the man blinks, inclining his head.

"And yet, you drank it."

"I had no choice."

"No?"

"No, you had already made it."

"You could have asked me to stop and make you another," the man points out, and any relief Will had felt in degrading his coffee just moments before fades with another rush of deep discomfort and displeasure.

"Perhaps next time," the man continues, "I shall make you something more to your taste." Without another word he holds out a paper bag, open, detailed carefully with the shop's logo and a design of something akin to an old fleur de lis. The intent is clear that Will take his untouched dessert with him.

"It would be rude to ignore a client's feedback on my work."

Will regards the bag at great and mistrustful length before finally taking it. He sets it beside the plate and his still-glowing phone, and cradles the big green mug with both hands again.

"Are you asking me to leave?"

The question is curt and so is the perceived slight behind it, as far as Will is concerned. The man tilts his head again, a bare motion, that becomes a gentle shake, once.

"You seem to be in a hurry."

"I am," Will agrees. He takes another sip, hoping to appease the man who lingers, still, who lets the others behind the counter tend to easy orders. Touching his tongue to his lips, Will tastes the cinnamon again, and more. Nutmeg maybe. No -

"There's chicory in this," Will murmurs, pleased inwardly by the man's brows lifting in tandem surprise at the words.

"You know your coffee."

"I know New Orleans," Will says, wry.

The man's smile is back, that soft, almost profound thing that rattles Will more than he wants to admit.

"I traveled before setting my shop up here," he says. "New Orleans I visited often, I am fond of it."

Will just nods, contented to leave the conversation there. Amicable enough and *over*. He hopes that perhaps now the man will leave, return to his work and his patrons and Will can escape unscathed and unremembered. Surely there are barely-awake rude customers - *clients* - that come to the shop often enough to blur into one continuous line of monotony. And in truth, after several moments, the man inclines his head again, almost thoughtful, and moves back to serve the people waiting in line.

Will doesn't turn to watch him work, he doesn't care. His phone hums even before he can reach for it and Will returns to his comfortable slouch of indifference, sipping his coffee until - to Will's surprise - it's just gone, milk and all. He sets the cup down and regards the muffin suspiciously before, with a sigh, bagging it and sliding it into his satchel and standing to go.

"Next time," the man calls from behind the espresso machine, hair in a surely orchestrated scatter across his brow. "I will find you something to make you speechless."

Will snorts, without looking up from the jumble of his shoulder bag and the muffin bag, his phone aglow against which he jams his thumb to make it stop. He nearly topples the table, grabbing the mug to keep it all stable, flustered by himself and this whole hideous experience. Next time he'll remember to make his own, if only for the avoidance of… *this*.

Even if that coffee won't have chicory in it.

Or funny little fern patterns with milk he didn't want anyway.

"There's quite an assumption in that," Will finally remarks. He doesn't need to meet the owner's gaze to know he's watching him, to know his eyes have drawn up again in the corners.

"I know my clients," he answers, amicably.

"I had one cup of coffee, that you made me, that isn't even - nevermind," Will mutters, shaking his head. "It was fine. Thank you for the muffin."

The milk-foamer hisses loudly and Will's shoulders draw up. He lingers a moment more, checking that he's got all his things, now certainly late for the client - an *actual* client - who's going to be waiting out in front of the shop with a sour expression and another card to play against Will when it comes to negotiating. He needs the book, he can't not get it - a first edition of Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux*, 1772 with etchings by Moreau is too rare to pass up and now he's late, because of *this* -

With a sigh, Will turns to go.

"Tomorrow, perhaps," calls the owner, his accented voice carrying a purr of satisfaction.

Will doesn't answer. Is this flirting? This persistent talking-to and… *banter*? He doesn't know anymore. It's been years, enough that to try and count them back is too depressing an endeavor for so early in the day, and if he's honest, he doesn't really give a shit if it is. He's not trying to do anything but part the line and make it out the door, and ignore the taste of cinnamon still sweet across his lips.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> “Afraid I’m going to leave a bad review online?” Will asks, brows raising as he watches his plate, his utensils, anything but the proprietor and all too aware of the man’s distinct delight in this.
>
> “Afraid you wouldn’t come back.”

Chapter Notes

> Endless thanks always to Noodle for her ferocious beta skills!

The cafe stays open six days a week from 6AM until four, staffed by three people not including its owner, and Hannibal makes it a point to be on shift every day unless circumstances outside of his control prevent him.

Rarely have they.

Four of the six days, Hannibal opens his cafe, starting at half past four to prepare that morning's cabinet selection. Among the elaborate muffins and scones, slices and a selection of cakes, many types of danish, savory filo and beautifully prepared sandwiches - all made on site, of course - Hannibal makes it a point to create something unusual and eye catching to stand out that day.

Banitsa on Mondays, rarely ever left over from the morning rush, and still warm by the time the last one is sold. Occasionally Hannibal adjusts the recipe, uses three cheeses instead of just one, seasons with thyme and garlic, replaces pastry with heavy dough and works up khachapuri for the afternoon rush.

Brinbrot on Tuesdays, from pears ordered the week before and left to ripen in the walk in. Djevrek on Wednesdays to carry through until Thursday, easy to keep and tasty both hot and cold. Sesame seeds replaced with poppy seeds, occasionally mixed together if Hannibal is feeling particularly whimsical. Fridays and Saturdays enjoy cream cakes and mousse that Hannibal prepares in the afternoons. Berries and sugar lace and dusted cocoa.

Perhaps the food itself draws people to it, perhaps the coffee - never made the same even on repeat orders - perhaps the presentation of the food both fresh made and cabinet ordered. The shop is known for Hannibal's passion for his work, for how well he knows his customers -

most by name, if not by their order - for his dedication from a ten-person lunch order to even the smallest fluffy. He loves his work. He loves his cafe.

He loves the surprises that walk through his door.

Even when they're half-staggering beneath a bag visibly overloaded, balancing a phone in one hand and a laptop beneath the other.

Even when their glasses are perched precariously near to falling off the front of their nose, and their hair appears not to have been combed in months, if ever.

Even when they don't look up from the device they're squinting at, lip held between their teeth, frumpy sweater skewed beneath the weight of their baggage.

"Hello again," Hannibal intones, offering only a smile as Will exhales a pained breath and closes his eyes. He opens them a moment later, and forces an expression that does not pass for pleasant.

He hadn't come back the next day, or the day after. Hannibal had seen him pass by in a hurry, thermos tucked under his arm, and discerned at least that he must work nearby. He wonders if this particular client waited until a time of day when the cafe was less crowded - optimistically, so that they could speak, realistically, because he wears his antisocial tendencies like armor.

"Hi," Will manages. "Do you have food? I mean, not - muffins. Breakfast stuff. Real food."

Hannibal reaches just past Will, watching the man almost flinch before choosing to freeze instead, and takes up a small menu card to present to him. There are four breakfast platters listed, smaller items beneath, all in the same elegant hand as the chalked menus above the counter.

"Anything you like," Hannibal tells him. It is mid-morning, closer, now, to the lunch menu, but he knows the man will hardly care. And in truth it is as easy to whip up eggs benedict at 11:30 as it is at 7AM. "And just a coffee?"

Will gives him a dry look, long-suffering in the utmost. "Can you do that? Just coffee?"

"I should hope so," Hannibal answers. Will's attention darts to the owner's mouth, barely quirked, and then just past him again, avoiding his eyes with particular skill.

"Coffee," Will agrees. He shoulders his bag higher and drags the menu closer across the counter, shaking his head. "I don't - anything. Anything's fine. Nothing sweet. I don't care. I normally -"

Hannibal tilts his head to the side, encouraging and curious both at this extension beyond their practical exchange. Will parts his lips with his tongue, revving himself up to speak again.

"I normally bring a lunch," he finally says, before adding, rueful as ever: "I thought I'd treat myself today."

Hannibal's smile warms further, enough that the expression is clear on his face as he turns to the machine, a moment of contemplation before he hums and reaches for another heavy cup.

"Would you like the coffee after your meal, then?"

"I -" Will frowns, considering, and shakes his head, shrugs, turns to look behind himself at the tables available. Hannibal doesn't ask anything more, just names the price for whatever he's making and accepts the reluctantly relinquished cash for it.

"There is a power plug by the table near the window, if you wished to utilize it," he offers, starting on the coffee.

At this, finally, there is a light that flickers brighter in Will's eyes. He glances towards the window, the table just big enough for computer and a plate, if he's careful. When he thinks Hannibal isn't looking, he slips another few dollars into the tip jar and trudges away to set up station.

For a man who appears so consistently distressed in clothing as well as countenance, Hannibal watches with no small fascination as his client settles into his little space. Bag off, phone on the table. He doesn't fix his sweater or the collar of his shirt tilted beneath it, but he unrolls a carefully wrapped cord from his bag, a laptop only a few years old, and arranges each in a particular way. His mouth works, little twitches of thought, and he finally sits, then, upright and focused, the tip of his tongue held between his lips.

There and gone again, swept away in a clatter of keys.

Or so it seems, at least, until he says aloud and with something near approval, "It's actually quiet in here."

"Fridays offer a welcome peace between ten and one," Hannibal says, pausing as he cleans the frother with a few quick hisses of steam. "Then, occasionally, a rush from then until closing."

The coffee he carries over is not as rich as the last he made for the man. Nor, Will notes with a raised brow, does it have milk in it.

"Something to clear the palate before breakfast." He offers only a brief narrowing of his eyes before retreating to the small cafe kitchen to prepare the order Will never actually made.

It is rare - and because of that, novel, perhaps - that someone gives Hannibal free reign on a meal. Regulars, perhaps, looking for something new to try, people too busy to consider the written specials. Hannibal has found that with food, unlike people, he rarely gets upset. Any emotion can be manipulated into inspiration for art. And Hannibal's cooking is nothing short of art.

Eggs are set to poach as Hannibal retrieves some ciabatta to slice thick and toast on a wide, pre-prepared pan in sweet oil. Dried basil and garlic salt, hand-made hollandaise and cracked pepper. Warm roasted vegetables - meant for a late afternoon salad - on the side and a

spooning of spicy salsa beside. Two tomato roses seasoned with pink and white salt. Translucent salmon folded in careful turns and twists beside the eggs.

In short, a masterpiece in its simplicity.

Hannibal wonders if the man would even notice the touches, or simply dig into his food without care for anything but sating hunger.

The coffee is gone by the time Hannibal returns to the table, cup empty of all but the dark line against its inner rim where the thinnest grounds had slipped through the filter. Ethiopian coffee, rich and bitter, with a hint of chilli just beneath. Spicy and pleasant.

Hannibal does not ask if it was enjoyed.

He knows it had been.

In the safety of a space carved for himself, Will has settled, shoulders lowered from the defensive posture he's held every other time Hannibal has seen him into something nearly comfortable. He even smiles, a little, very briefly, as he moves his computer aside enough to make room for the plate. Will takes it in with genuine surprise, clearly far more than he expected from a coffee shop lunch.

"Christ," he mutters, before shaking his head, brows knitting as he suppresses another smile. "I mean, thanks. Thank you. You did this just now?"

"To make amends for last time," Hannibal responds.

A florid heat blooms across Will's cheeks, and he pushes his glasses up higher before taking the plate in front of himself. "Last time was fine. Honestly."

"Perhaps I'm trying to impress you beyond 'fine'," suggests Hannibal, and at this, Will allows a fleeting grin.

"I'm impressed," he admits. "Of course, I haven't tried it yet, but - the coffee -"

A flicker over Hannibal's lips and he inclines his head again. Such an archaic gesture, but it doesn't sit as pretentious on him, it seems to fit, with the accent and bearing of a prince. He does not gloat or goad for further praise, he merely sets his feet comfortably and watches Will take up his cutlery.

"Not quite speechless," Hannibal comments, watches Will raise an eyebrow at the words. "All the more reason to keep trying."

Will ducks his head to hide a wry smile, cutting neatly through the eggs benedict so that the yolk spills across the thick bread. He spears the vegetables, a bit of egg and toast and salmon, and lifts a hand to his lips as he chews. The color rising across his cheeks darkens a little more, and he tilts his head to the side when he finishes.

"You're trying awfully hard," he remarks, though not with displeasure. "It's very good. Better than fine. The coffee was enough, I've never had spicy coffee before." A pause, and he adds,

“I didn’t know I needed it.”

“Music to my ears,” Hannibal says.

“Afraid I’m going to leave a bad review online?” Will asks, brows raising as he watches his plate, his utensils, anything but the proprietor and all too aware of the man’s distinct delight in this.

“Afraid you wouldn’t come back.”

It’s enough that Will nearly chokes, coughing inelegantly into his napkin. It takes him a few moments to recover, feigning distraction with his computer until he can find words again. Displayed across the screen - beyond the blinking email alerts and bouncing messages - is an auction for a copy of *Moby-Dick*, price climbing as the time ticks down. There is a moment of genuine distraction, as Will’s fingers hover above the touchpad, but he returns to his plate, having grounded himself at least temporarily.

“Do you give everyone this kind of attention?” he asks. “It must be tiring.”

“I find that a personal approach is remembered,” Hannibal replies, feels himself smile, just a little, when the man’s expression almost falls before he adjusts it back to neutrality. “I enjoy interacting with people. And it is much easier to do so, here, than it was as a doctor.”

Will glances up, only so far as the man’s hips, and then just as quickly away again. His jaw works, and his eyes narrow a little. “You’re not kidding.”

“No,” agrees Hannibal, and Will snorts.

“What kind of doctor?”

“Emergency room surgery, and later psychiatry.”

“Less blood and tears in owning a cafe.”

“One hopes,” Hannibal responds, and Will laughs despite himself, a brisk, bright sound quickly muffled behind his napkin. This time he does lift his eyes further, to take in the man at some length, disrupted only in his upward drift by a glance to the auction on his screen, and then back again. Past narrow hips and a lean waist, a tidy shirt in garish blue and green checks tucked neatly into his trousers. Broad chest and broader shoulders, long strong arms and the pressed collar of his shirt resting against a graceful neck -

"Do I get to know the name of the chef in question?" Will asks, as his attention flutters away once more to his plate.

“If he may learn that of his client,” Hannibal responds amicably, and Will considers for a beat before setting his cutlery against the plate, soundless. He hadn’t really thought his curiosity would come free, and there should be nothing problematic in giving his name, surely. He is not on the run or in protective custody. His name is known, in fact, among those in the book trade. It is hardly a secret.

It has just been a very long time since he had given his name to anyone not wanting to trade him a priceless antique.

“Will,” he offers. “Graham.”

A hum at that, an acknowledgement and a tilt of his head as the man commits it to memory. Will wonders if it’s eidetic or learned.

“Hannibal Lecter,” the man - Hannibal - finally responds, and Will can hear the smile on his voice, the warmth in it. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Will.” The accent curls Will’s name in a way he hasn’t heard it turned before. He hates to admit it’s pleasant but can hardly deny that it is.

"Nice to meet you," Will manages. The quiet hours at the cafe afford a respite, from his own space and for Hannibal, he imagines. Will finds himself hoping suddenly for an influx of customers to distract the man's attention, and at the same time, grateful that there isn't one.

It isn't unusual to find himself tongue-tied, so much as it's unusual that he has occasion to notice it. Few conversations that don't take place with either customers, other collectors, or dogs have been his own kind of respite, one ongoing for years. And years. And fucking years.

Muscles atrophy when you don't use them, and Will figures that maybe speech is just the same. The proprietor's friendly small-talk isn't unwelcome, but damned if Will can recall how to return it, if that was ever a skill he possessed. There's a reason that some people go into customer service, and others don't. There's a reason that Hannibal faces his 'clients' each day, and Will prefers to deal with them at distance.

He can try, at least. He can try so that when all of this inevitably fails in a catastrophic flaming mess, he can say that he made the attempt. Will sighs, shifting in his chair and setting his napkin to his empty plate.

"Is it okay if I work here?" he asks, and even that brush against being personable sets his teeth on edge. "And -"

"More coffee," Hannibal guesses, and Will smiles, small and rueful.

"Please."

Hannibal bends to take the plate as well, careful to balance the cup Will had emptied previously atop it as he makes his way to the kitchen again to deposit them both. Coffee comes in a new, larger cup, still black, but no longer that spicy wonder Will had savored every drop of. This is softer, something smooth, like vanilla without the sweetness - the coffee remains blissfully bitter.

Hannibal does not return to stand beside Will again, and he returns to his work, as Hannibal returns to his own.

As predicted, at several minutes past one, the cafe begins to fill up again, people in for lunch and sweet drinks. The cabinet begins to empty, now, items carefully wrapped and bagged for

those taking them away, presented beautifully for those endeavoring to enjoy them here. Will zones out the noise, concentrates on the auction's end at just under twenty thousand pounds, well beyond his means. There seemed to always be a clamour once an item made it over a certain threshold, all inhibitions forgotten in the desire to own something *so valuable*. He'll have to make a call. He tries not to think about it.

He notices that it has calmed down again, only when his coffee is replaced with a third, and Hannibal smiles at him without a word, before taking his second empty cup away.

Will watches him go, surreptitious and sly, from over the mug and his glasses both. They fog from the drink, this time carrying in it the shadow of dark chocolate - far from sweet, rich in its bitterness, and with hints of fruit throughout. He savors it slowly, little sips to avoid burning himself, and just as intently savors the equally pleasing sight of Hannibal walking away, all long dancer's legs and the slow shifting of his muscular -

Will muffles a cough as he chokes on his coffee, and quickly sets it down.

How long *has* it been?

Years.

Years since he's had any sort of acquaintanceship not related, in some way, to his business. Years since he's had a friendship that didn't involve covert bargaining for books at the same time. Years since he's had…

Well.

That.

And the last time Will even had *that* was nothing more than a rough tug in a cramped bathroom stall at a book auction.

It's all very presumptuous - optimistic to the point of stupidity to even consider. It's the kind of naivete that Will thought he had managed to purge out of himself long ago. The man - *Hannibal* - is running a business. Every cup of coffee costs god-knows-what to Will and so of course, of *course* he'd continue to bring them. It's good customer service. It's good business.

And even if there is a flirtation there, doesn't that just serve to keep Will coming back?

It's pathetic, really, like the inebriated college student who swears the cute bartender wants him as he's plied with drink after drink. He doesn't blame Hannibal for this. Clearly he does his job well if he's even got Will thinking this much about it. Well-played then, and to the tune of an admittedly fantastic lunch and three cups of coffee.

Will doesn't let himself look again, content to distantly imagine as he considers his contacts to whom he could trade or flip the book that has only just come into his possession.

Just before four, Will hears the click of Hannibal's shoes against the floor as he approaches him again. No coffee this time, but a bag, neatly folded, in his hand.

“I am, unfortunately, about to do something exceptionally rude, and ask you to leave so that I may close up the cafe,” Hannibal tells him, and Will blinks, realizing that he is the only person left in the cafe, and that the day outside has grown late and warm. Nearly five hours out of the store, around people, in public… Will wonders what even possessed him.

“I hope I can counter my rudeness with something a little more pleasant.”

“Christ,” Will sighs. He rubs his eyes briskly, unsettling his glasses, and then jams them back into place before standing up, almost unsteady considering how long he’s been bent over his computer. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to take up a whole damn table all day -”

“Entirely allowed,” Hannibal tells him, but it hardly stops the sudden surge of movement.

Will clicks his computer closed, dropping it into the back of his bag, dragged into his chair and nearly knocking it over the process. It slips in neatly alongside a half-dozen books, each in plastic, and he stuffs his phone into his back pocket. He takes his wallet out at the same time before pacing away from his things towards the counter.

“I should say I don’t mean to be a prick, but I don’t like lying,” Will mutters, stopping in the middle of the empty cafe to look back to Hannibal, still just standing there, still just holding out the bag. Will regards it, then Hannibal again, then his wallet. “How much? Sorry. I’ll tip more for using your internet all day -”

“No need,” Hannibal responds, amiable and pleasant, despite an entire day - from what Will could tell - behind the counter serving people and making personal calls to Will’s table. Some people, he considers again, are born to work with people.

“There is a psychological phenomenon, whereby seeing a cafe occupied one wants to go in themselves to see whether it is worth their time. You have made my Friday quite busy with your welcome presence.” Another narrowing of his eyes before he steps up to Will again, holds out the bag for him as a butler would for his charge.

“Consider it a down payment for bringing in business. And, perhaps, encouragement to come again.”

Will shutters the mistrust that he immediately feels, and takes the bag from Hannibal from Hannibal with a peculiar gentleness. “But you -”

“Insist,” Hannibal finishes.

Will sighs, and worries his lower lip between his teeth before returning to his things and carefully settling the little bag inside his own. He tries to see the bright side of this - he’s only slightly less naive than the previously imagined drunk who thinks the bartender is flirting with them. He has a reason to come back. An obligation, really, but to his great surprise he hasn’t minded a day with the shop shuttered. He worked, still, and didn’t have to suffer window-shoppers popping in to touch his books.

As for everything else he imagined?

There’s no harm in daydreams.

“Thanks,” he manages, bag heavy across his shoulder again as he makes his way to the door. “It - it really was good.”

“You are most welcome, Will.” And that same curve over the single syllable again. Hannibal folds his hands behind his back and walks just behind Will until they both get to the door, less ushering him out and more accompanying.

“When work next permits you, I will be happy to be challenged in my coffee compositions by your complex tastes.”

He watches the way heat makes Will’s cheeks pink and wonders if he is deliberately playing hard to get or is honestly as unused to such attention as Hannibal gives him. Surely he shouldn’t be, surely someone with such cleverness and self-possession - and undeniable handsomeness - would find many a person interested in them.

Next comes the question of whether or not Will is ever interested in *them*, and, likewise, in Hannibal.

Will stops, just on the sidewalk. He looks back towards Hannibal in the doorway, makes it to his knees, and then rolls his eyes towards the sky as if seeking strength from any damn deity that would like to grant him some. He draws a breath. His lips part. The question is there, perched, right at the tip of his tongue.

As with his coffee, bitterness sweeps away the sweet, and all he can manage before he turns towards his shop again is:

"Maybe tomorrow."

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> For whatever this is - and *isn't*, more specifically - the company has been welcome. Though the conversations have been stilted - by Will, entirely, not by Hannibal, who Will envies for his skill at it - and often revolving around whatever impossible drink or dish the proprietor has conjured that day, it's been nice to have someone to talk to outside of the small and vicious world in which Will otherwise resides.
>
> Actually nice.
>
> Not even facetiously nice.

Chapter Notes

> Beta'd by the insurmountable Noodle!

"Egg."

Will just blinks. "Egg."

"Yes." Hannibal's smile lifts only one corner of his mouth, and the way he tilts his head makes him look almost mischievous. It should not suit a full-grown man, it should not suit anyone, let alone make them look genuinely attractive. "A Scandinavian recipe that is entirely underused in this country. It makes the coffee more -"

"Clean," Will says, licking his lips and offering a glance up over his glasses, brief enough to meet Hannibal's eyes but not hold them. "Not that - I mean -"

"Precisely that," Hannibal smiles a little wider and turns to regard the rest of his cafe. Everyone tended to, no line to wait on, his own staff comfortable and happy to go about their tasks unsupervised - as is most often the case. Hannibal is proud of his staff.

"You couldn't have made this on the machine."

"Certainly not, it would have been the last thing the machine managed to make," Hannibal smiles. "I brewed it on the stove for you."

What started as a last-ditch option to caffeinate has become a consistency. For the better part of a week and a half, barring days that require unfortunate meetings in person elsewhere, Will

has been content to shutter his shop for extended lunch breaks. Working, still, always working - or at least feigning it convincingly while he watches graceful hands and sharp cheekbones, bright-dark eyes and a tight ass. It's pathetic, and Will knows it is. The strange guy in the ugly sweaters who sits by the window. The nerd in the glasses tragically happy to even pretend that someone attractive would give him the time of day. But even with that constant litany that asks him why he's doing this to himself, Will enjoys it in the way a starving man would take whatever scraps were offered to him, willing now to try anything Hannibal suggests.

Even coffee with milk in it.

Or in this case, an egg.

Will takes another sip, cradling the cup in both hands and resting it lightly against his stomach as he slouches. "I've had it - egg whites, I mean - in cocktails before. It 'softens the mouthfeel'. Apparently. Which was nearly enough just in phrasing to make me bring it back up again."

Hannibal breathes a laugh through his nose, head ducked but eyes raised. "Not only a connoisseur of coffee then - you enjoy cocktails too."

He receives a particularly dry look at this, before Will sets the mug to the table and forces himself more upright. Or at least slouching forward, instead of back.

"If combining rye whiskey and ice is considered a cocktail."

"And egg whites," Hannibal reminds him.

"Once. I had a meeting at a bar. Fancy place. Not my choice. Also wasn't my choice that it ended up being a meeting - I thought it was a date," Will snorts. "Not the first time someone's been more interested in my books than my bed. Probably not the last, if I'm being pathetically honest today."

Hannibal's light brows raise just slightly at the words, taking them in, turning them over in his mind and taking them as a well-earned piece of genuine information. For the days Will has been here, Hannibal has made it a point to impress him with unusual coffees. Cardamom, sea salt, butter, orange liqueur, fresh mint, and now this. He has found that he gets endless pleasure in watching Will appreciate his coffee. He takes his time with it, as someone would with wine.

He enjoys it.

"Are you a collector?" Hannibal asks him, delicate to start with, as it surely would be uncouth to offer an invitation immediately. To a date, of course. Rather than -

Though, certainly, that too.

"When I can afford to be," Will answers, before shaking his head at his own vague response. It's habit, at this point, too accustomed to every conversation being a prelude to haggling.

“Books. Rare books. Rare *old* books - first editions, small print runs, versions with specific etchings. I have a shop but -”

“Nearby,” Hannibal asks, and Will jerks his head towards the window.

“Few blocks away. Mass market and stuff I don’t care about - damaged or just not worth dealing with - goes in the shop. I hunt what I can through estate sales and auctions and other dealers. I keep some when I can afford it. The rest I turn over to other collectors who can’t be bothered and would rather pay someone else to find them instead. Exciting, isn’t it.”

It’s not a question, and it’s accompanied by a snort before he takes another sip of his coffee. For whatever this is - and *isn’t*, more specifically - the company has been welcome. Though the conversations have been stilted - by Will, entirely, not by Hannibal, who Will envies for his skill at it - and often revolving around whatever impossible drink or dish the proprietor has conjured that day, it’s been nice to have someone to talk to outside of the small and vicious world in which Will otherwise resides.

Actually nice.

Not even facetiously nice.

“It is fascinating,” Hannibal replies, and Will finds, to his pleasure and surprise, that he is entirely genuine. “There is something wonderful in the discovery of a book thought lost or forgotten. A book that, for all intents and purposes, does not exist anywhere but in the hands of the person possessing it. A piece of history.”

He allows his eyes to slip over Will’s form, folded in his chair both for comfort and for preservation, though Hannibal hopes that he will be able to coax the man to be more relaxed here, if nowhere else.

“You must come into contact with a lot of interesting people,” he says. “The collectors and the curious alike.”

“That’s a word for it,” Will allows, “until you’ve got to deal with them for a living.”

He chews his lower lip and considers the lack of acidity in his words. He’s not exactly welcoming, warm and open as Hannibal is so goddamn easily, but the bite has gone from much of what he says, the need to lash out in defense before the other can make a move. It’s comfortable.

What a strange feeling.

“I’ve found that most of us fit into a few groups,” he continues, despite his constant surprise that anything he says holds Hannibal’s attention for any length of time. “You’ve got the single buyers. They’re just that. They buy, they hoard, they never fucking sell until they’re dead and their estate liquidates. Old businessmen mostly - financiers who like being able to show off books that make them look worldly. Once in a while you get a buyer who’s a fetishist - they’ve got a penchant for something in particular. A certain author. Bibles. I have one who only wants editions printed in France in 1832.”

Hannibal blinks.

“Fancies himself as *les miserables*,” Will shrugs, and snorts. “He is that, *constantly*.”

Hannibal motions to the chair across from Will, who regards both man and seat with a moment of mistrust, quickly shoved away as he nods instead.

“There are buyer-organizations, too, museums and particular collections, archives trying to complete a set, things like that. The paperwork’s a fucking nightmare. On the seller side, besides the piratical auction houses, there’s plenty of dilettantes who come and go - they think it’s romantic. That’s until the first time their back’s against the wall, and they’ve got to sell their favorite child to keep the lights on. The ones who don’t sell won’t last. The ones who do sell, well.”

Will draws a deep breath, and shrugs, allowing a taut smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Then you’ve got me. Weirdos who smell like old glue and moldy paper, hissing at each other like feral cats about who needs that first edition of *Moby-Dick* with the white end-papers more. Fucking sixty left in the world after a fire at Harpers in 1853 wiped the rest out.”

He pushes his hands back through his hair and holds his curls wild between his fingers, watching Hannibal above the top of his glasses. “I figure most of us will perish when a shelf topples over and we choke to death on all the dust.”

Hannibal wonders if Will even realizes how remarkable he is. He loses himself in his words and immediately the walls fall away, the tension eases from him, being caught on a topic he knows and cherishes. Small talk is not a game for him. Rather, it is a battle, but this...

Hannibal listens and folds his hands on the table in front of him, fingers cupping elbows, watching the way Will’s hair is snared between his fingers, wanting, desperately, to touch it right then. To feel it against his palm. To feel it against his lips.

He swallows.

"I think you underestimate your own uniqueness," Hannibal considers, his smile warming his entire face as he looks at Will. "You do not simply procure, you appreciate. You nurture a love for such thing and allow others to share in it. I already feel guilty for pulling you from your customers so often," he grins, a brief show of teeth. "And entirely unwilling to watch you leave when you inevitably must."

He watches the quick flicker of expressions across Will’s face, and saves him the worry of attempting an answer to that, seeking another, instead.

"Your latest, the Moby Dick, did you get it?"

Will’s lips purse, but he doesn’t aim his negativity directly at Hannibal, only in his general direction. “The white end-papers? No. And don’t think I don’t see the fucking irony in being forced to keep hunting it.”

He drops his hands to his lap, and then remembering, takes up the mug instead.

“Appreciation is necessary, fondness is weakness,” Will remarks. “Kill your darlings. It’s not a matter of sharing love, it’s fucking literary trafficking, from one hoarder to another. Sorry, *collector*. The more you love them, the harder you make it on yourself. Love blinds, when buying, it makes you spend more than you would if you didn’t care about whatever you’re after. And it makes it that much worse when you have to give them up. It becomes an amputation, self-administered.”

His throat clicks as he takes down a long sip, shaking his head and leaning forward, arms against the table, gaze focused on his milky - no, *eggy* - coffee.

“You said you keep some,” Hannibal reminds him, gently, exhaling when Will’s tension recedes into the kind of smile reserved only for one’s dearest friends or family.

“I’m lucky. The ones I like aren’t in demand.”

“Such as?”

Will chews his lip, now truly hesitant and not only from innate defensiveness. The walls are down, but there are courtyards deeper still where Will allows only those books to reside, and not those people or things that will be removed from him. He doesn’t mistrust Hannibal - the man isn’t a part of all this, though if he were it would be a game expertly played.

Kill your darlings, Will reminds himself, with a sigh.

“I like science-fiction. Dystopian stuff. First edition, first print of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, a few Huxley firsts, Heinlein.” Will purses his lips, brows knit, and then his expression eases to a distant ache of nostalgia. “I had a first run *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. 1949. They printed it with two dust jackets - green and red. There were two green for every red, and the red ink tends to fade so it’s hard to find a really nice red version. It was beautiful.”

Hannibal continues to watch him, the way his expression and voice soften entirely when remembering the book. Hannibal wonders if it was the first he had to let go of, if, since then, he has slowed his acquisition to just a trickle, once a year, twice at most, just to keep life interesting. He wonders where Will lost it, to whom and what for.

He doesn’t ask.

“A collection worth thousands is worth so much more to the person they belong to,” Hannibal tells him, and it draws another brief smile from the man in front of him, nearly finished with his coffee. Hannibal should get back, he needs to sweep the counter and check on the supplies in the kitchen, he needs to make sure his closing staff remember to do a stocktake of the remaining cabinet food for the week.

He needs to, and yet he wants nothing more than to sit with Will at the little table and have coffee for the rest of the day. Talk together, about books and genres and anything else that comes to mind. He enjoys listening to Will speak, enjoys catching the tails of an accent no

longer prevalent in his speech but always still there. He enjoys the way Will tries to watch him and hide his doing so.

He enjoys the company.

“I suppose cooking books and medical texts would not be as in demand as fiction or poetry as well. Perhaps I should start an investment.”

There flickers a strange expression across Will’s features. A smile, small, that does not soften his eyes, which narrow towards his coffee. He thinks of the cocktail bar, and the pretense that got him there. And with a breath drawn that in turn pulls up his shoulders, slouching forward, Will reconstructs the walls around his courtyard.

“Buying or selling? If you’re buying, depending on what you want, they’re not hard to come by - usually printed in bigger runs because they’re for mass consumption or academia. If you’re selling, it’s just a matter of finding the particular buyer who wants things like that. Age helps. The types who collect medical texts especially want seventeenth century, mostly - the Italian anatomists.”

His throat clicks as he swallows, and lets his eyes settle back to his computer, long gone dark. He stirs it back to life with his finger.

“Cookbooks I’ll have to research. Not anything I’ve dealt with before but I’m sure I could find you someone who has.”

Hannibal watches the walls rebuild, the way Will returns to himself, the body language, the cover of the screen even when it isn’t in front of him. He can feel that tug of annoyance at having said the wrong thing, at having tried to say the right one, to encourage and show an interest. He considers again the concept of propriety, and wonders if he could suggest another investment for the two of them without sounding too… forward.

But subtle seems to do little more than irk the man or slip past him. Far from stupid, Will has merely learned to deal with situations literally instead of attempting to read around people’s bullshit, certainly helpful in his line of work. So Hannibal decides - before the drawbridge closes on the mind of this exceptional man - to ask bluntly.

“I had hoped to acquire something new before inviting you to dinner,” he says. “But I am certain I will be able to find something to suit your taste, and surprise you, from my current collection at home. If you will join me, of course.”

Instinct makes Will draw a breath, but surprise makes him hold it. Even the constant, twitchy movement of his hand stills, hovering motionless above the keyboard. His jaw flickers tighter, then loosens, as he forces himself to hear Hannibal’s words and the intention of the man who speaks them. He knows Hannibal is being genuine. He knows that he, himself, is being skittish and defensive.

He knows.

But paranoia is a hard pattern to break.

Will withdraws his hand from the computer, and sets his bottom lip between his teeth, his gaze focused straight ahead, past the man who - for some unfathomable reason - has seen fit not only to spend his time in dreary conversation about dusty old books, but now -

This.

“I don’t -” Date? Fuck? Have normal human interaction with? “ - *see* people that I work with. I mean, I did. I have. It’s a fucking disaster every time. It’s usually a fucking disaster even when I try to see people I *don’t* work with, to be really frank about it, so if you’re wanting me to price things for you, or find something, I don’t mind. Honestly, it’s worth it for the coffee and you can just pay me cost -”

“Will.”

“- but if you do, actually, want me to come over *not* as business - which isn’t really fair, since you’d be doing the same work there in cooking as you do here -”

“Will.”

He stops. Cheeks scarlet beneath bright blue eyes, Will looks up, finally up, and meets Hannibal’s gaze. And when he smiles, despite the doubt and wariness etched into his features, he murmurs, “I really am *terrible* at this, aren’t I?”

Hannibal just gives him a look, a gentle smile that speaks volumes over words he could have said. Potentially patronizing and silly and useless words. Will appreciates, for the moment, the silence and acceptance in it that he gets from Hannibal. Then the man licks his lips and Will’s eyes flick very deliberately to the window behind him and he swallows.

“I would like to invite you for dinner,” Hannibal repeats. “Because I would like to have more time, and freer time, to talk with you.” He sits back, allowing Will his space to catch his breath, but does not leave the table, does not leave without an answer, one way or another. He knows that should he give Will leave to run, he would. Excusing himself in the most endearing way and nearly tipping the chair over in his hurry. Again.

He isn’t sure he would be able to let him go without following to snare him close and kiss his doubts from him.

“If you would allow me, I would love an opportunity to cook for you and share a meal.”

Will allows another smile, one that lasts this time. He can’t recall the last time he’s been offered a date, let alone dinner, let alone even *more* with someone like Hannibal.

‘Never’ seems like a safe bet.

“So we can eat,” Will murmurs. “And talk.”

“Yes,” Hannibal sighs, smile widening.

“Not only about books and coffee.”

“We probably will a little.”

“But not only. I spend all day in books.”

“Not only books,” agrees Hannibal.

Will’s smile breaks into a grin, and he tries to fight it down but can’t. He can’t and maybe there’s no reason to, when in spite of Will’s rampant unpleasantness and pervasive paranoia, this man - this absurdly talented and ridiculously handsome man - has been so genuinely friendly towards him.

One never knows what they’ll find wandering into estate sales.

Maybe the same is true for coffee shops.

He breathes a laugh, shaking his head but not to decline. “So we’ll eat. And talk, about everything, a little bit.” A pause, a breath, a quick and mischievous narrowing of eyes. “And -”

Hannibal’s lips part briefly and he smiles before closing them and swallowing. He watches Will, open, pleasant, delighted by the acceptance and the gentle nervousness that wafts around the man like perfume. He leans forward, just enough to lever himself from the chair.

“And,” he confirms, smiling wider before he stands, walks around the chair to set it carefully back in place. He lets the promise hang between them, both aware enough and interested enough that one of them is bound to stop beating about the bush and plow right through it. He hopes.

“Tomorrow evening, perhaps, around seven?”

Will breathes another laugh and nods. “Seven.”

“May I?” Hannibal gestures to Will’s computer, beneath it, a notebook. When allowed, he takes it up to write his address and number for Will to keep. Hannibal does not ask for Will’s in return. Trusts, perhaps, that Will will come, and if he does not, that Hannibal would find him in his bookstore perhaps a week from now, with fresh and interesting coffee in a loathed take-away mug.

Will takes the notebook back, raising his chin as he studies the information, stores it and remembers it, and blushing warm, he gently closes it. “Is it improper if I see you before then? For lunch. Even though we’ll both be working.”

Hannibal’s lips press together and he sets his hands behind his back again, proper, tall, presented.

“I will reserve your table for eleven,” he says, and with another brief smile that lingers in his eyes when it fades from his lips, he returns to work.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“I brought you a book.”

Hannibal’s smile is immediate and warm. He is dressed impeccably, of course, in a suit that is surely bespoke and perhaps worth as much as some of the books in Will’s back room. Dark blue and with a darker shirt beneath, a tie that would scream in the worst possible way on anyone else sits comfortably knotted against his throat.

He has a fucking pocket square.

Will is **really** bad at dates.

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by the ever-fearless Noodle!

Will closes shop early, and wonders if he should be more concerned that it hardly matters when he does.

It helps, of course, that he’s constantly connected - nagged at, really - by his phone. He plugs it into a charger as soon as he’s in the car, waiting at least until he’s clear of Baltimore before glancing to it, and typing out answers to emails one handed along the empty drive back to Wolf Trap. It’s silly. If he’d been thinking at all clearly he’d have brought a fucking decent change of clothes to the city, scrubbed himself up in the sink, reminded himself that it doesn’t fucking matter anyway because no date, in the history of Will Graham, has ever ultimately ended up well, and he could have just gone from there.

He didn’t do that. He didn’t do any of that because he woke up far too early with thoughts of dinner with Hannibal, and an erection so stiff Will swears it could have punched holes through sheet metal. He’d jerked off in the shower, imagining - with alarming specificity - just how the muscles in Hannibal’s ass would curve while he was fucking Will into the mattress, and muttering under his breath beneath the spray for Hannibal to pull his hair.

He’d finally done it himself, reaching back to snare a fist into curls made heavy with water, and he came so hard it hit the shower wall.

So that's how his day started. He pretended, with whatever meager charm and coyness he could muster, that his day did not start that way during his lunch at the cafe. He pretended with just as much skill, after their admittedly sweet and somewhat shy conversation, that he wasn't going to go back to his shop afterwards and masturbate out his anxiety in the dingy bathroom in the back.

He did, and it was every bit as humiliating as it should have been, really. That time, he thought about how thick Hannibal's cock must be, plunging in and out of his mouth, the vein pulsing against his tongue until Hannibal in turn pulsed semen down the back of his throat, and then chided Will for dripping spit down his chin from the rough fucking.

As Will races into the house, greeting his dogs as he goes and redirecting in a skid towards the kitchen to feed them, he can't help but wonder if this is all - truly - a terrible idea. Even if they get into bed together, even *if* - and that is a *huge*, really *insurmountable* if - then Will's going to come soon as a fucking schoolboy over it. Too many nights watching snippets of porn, too little actual human contact, there's actually no way it won't be humiliating.

By the time he's dished food for the dogs, he's convinced himself he's not going.

He gets ready anyway.

He avoids the suits, honestly, he's not interviewing for a fucking job and they're probably embarrassingly out of style anyway. Neither can he wear another comfortable, admittedly frumpy sweater, because Hannibal sees him practically every damn day in those anyway. So he goes to the bathroom to shower - quickly, no fucking touching below the waist beyond soaping and rinsing - and briskly dries his hair on the way back out.

Naked, still, he juts the door open to let the dogs out while he goes to get dressed. Black slacks, and a black button-down. No. Too much black. Black slacks, and a crimson button-down. Red. Dark red. Scarlet? Fuck it, at least it's not black. He grabs a jacket, olive green, and only once he's jerked it free and knocked several hangers to the floor does he realize he's dressing like Christmas.

Black slacks. Crimson shirt. Black jacket.

It's a fucking blessing he's been forced to buy these things to meet with snooty clients.

He tries to tame his hair, while brushing his teeth at the same time. The latter works, the former doesn't. He imagines Hannibal's fingers in his hair again, craning his neck back and forcing a bend into his spine to make Will lift his hips higher so he can fuck him and hold him in place, the bed squeaking beneath -

Will splashes water onto his face, in hopes of staving off his burgeoning erection.

It's fine. He's fine. It's dinner and talking and.

And.

He's not fine. He's not going. This is a terrible idea, and as Will goes to let the dogs back into the house, he regales himself with the retelling of every single fumbling fuck and bad date he's ever had. He's pleasantly surprised at how long the list is, still going - though 'fucks' outweigh 'dates' - as he shuts down the house and goes to the car.

He runs out of examples approximately a mile away from his house.

He's not late, though, and that's some small blessing. He can't imagine that Hannibal's the type to ever be late, neat and tidy as he is, relaxed as he is even during their busiest time of day at the cafe. He can't even imagine Hannibal stressed. Or unhappy. Or anything but cruelly handsome and unfairly charming.

Will would have hated him if they were in school together.

He stops by the bookstore to pick up the book he - of course - forgot earlier. *Vine and Scalpel*, 1967 - first edition, first impression, from Jacaranda Press out of Brisbane. How the fuck it came into Will's shop, he hasn't a clue, but in searching for cookbooks after their conversation before, he couldn't resist pulling it off the shelf. It would pick up maybe a hundred bucks, if he were very lucky, but it's more the title that charmed him into taking it. Apparently about Australian doctors who became vineyard owners.

He hopes Hannibal thinks it's as funny as he does.

He probably won't. Why would he? Will isn't funny. He's not charming or clever or witty. Maybe a little, in that dry and hopeless and nebbishy Woody Allen way, and nobody wants to be that guy. Nobody - certainly - wants to *fuck* that guy. By the time Will turns onto Hannibal's street, along rows of impossibly beautiful homes with impossibly perfect lawns, he's convinced himself not to go again.

He stops in front of the house anyway, letting the car idle as he checks his notebook.

And his phone.

Fucking *Moby-Dick* again.

"White end-papers, fuck you," Will mutters under his breath. He meant to bring wine. He didn't, of course, remember that any more than he remembered to bring the book with him the first time or remember to bring a change of clothes to work. Hell, he hasn't even brought a charger for his phone but for the one in the car, which is really perfect considering how quickly Hannibal's going to regret all of this and how soon Will is going to find himself going back out to Wolf Trap again to jerk off furiously and sleep alone.

He shuts the car off. Shuts the door. Locks it. Realizes he forgot the book a-fucking-gain and opens the car to get it before locking it once more. He takes in the width and breadth of the house, cursing mildly under his breath, less as to the expense of it - Will encounters plenty of rich pricks in his day-to-day with homes much larger than this - but rather that the owner of this particular home is so particularly charming and has - for some unholy reason - chosen Will, in particular, to come to dinner with him.

And.

Will rings the bell and holds his breath, and when it opens he's flushed, book held against his chest.

"I brought you a book."

Hannibal's smile is immediate and warm. He is dressed impeccably, of course, in a suit that is surely bespoke and perhaps worth as much as some of the books in Will's back room. Dark blue and with a darker shirt beneath, a tie that would scream in the worst possible way on anyone else sits comfortably knotted against his throat.

He has a fucking pocket square.

Hannibal steps aside to let Will into the house, close the door behind him and hold out his hand for Will's coat, finding the book in his palm instead. For a moment, Hannibal just meets Will's eyes with the same pleased grin, eyes wrinkling at the corners in his amusement, and then he turns it to carefully unwrap and look to see what Will had brought him.

The title immediately has Hannibal delighted, and he is so careful opening it, cradling the spine, fingers splayed against the back cover to hold it steady, fingertips gentle to the pages themselves. He handles the book as one would a lover, protective and careful and almost loving. Will does not regret giving it to him. He shrugs out of his coat as Hannibal continues to look through it before carefully closing it and setting it to the dark wood table in the hallway, lined up perfectly parallel with the table edge.

"I wish I had your capacity to surprise and enchant," Hannibal tells him. "Thank you, Will."

He gestures again, to let Will walk ahead of him into the enormous sitting room, through it to the dining room, and finally into the kitchen, as Hannibal follows.

"I trust you found the house without incident? Can I offer you some wine? Dinner is almost done. I'm afraid I leaned on the side of caution in wanting to make sure it was hot for your arrival. You will excuse me."

Will? Excuse him?

"Of course," Will murmurs, steps as cautious as a stray dog entering a house for the first time. He stops just inside the kitchen, bigger than Will's living room, and takes in the pristine marble counters and neatly arranged appliances. Everything shines, like a showroom rather than somewhere that someone has been cooking in.

"I mean," he amends, "of course you're excused, you're the one who's cooking. And of course I found the house fine."

Will wishes he had worn a tie so he could just go ahead and hang himself with it.

Instead, he settles - warily - onto a stool beside the island where Hannibal continues his work. He watches the neat movements, no energy wasted, in skimming evenly cut vegetables into the dish he's making, and even the sight of Hannibal's hands - let alone his forearms, fiercely

strong and elegant - is enough to make Will regret not masturbating in advance before coming here.

He blushes, without explanation, and parts his lips with his tongue, managing a smile.

“Is it a pain in the ass if I watch?” he asks. “It smells incredible.”

Wine. Hannibal asked about wine.

“I can have a glass if you are.”

Just one. Just one because he’ll be sober enough by the time dinner’s over to drive back afterwards, because Will’s entirely too certain that’s exactly what will happen.

“I do hope,” Hannibal says, gathering the chopped vegetables in his large palms and tossing them into the pan, “that it tastes just the same.” When he turns, he is smiling still, and he takes down a bellied glass from a cabinet of countless, all shapes and all sizes, and pours from a bottle still dusty from a cellar Will is suddenly aware he is unsurprised Hannibal has.

“Domaine Leroy Chambertin Grand Cru,” Hannibal explains, passing Will a glass that is not even half full, and Will realizes, with a cold dread, that he knows shit all about wine. “1976. A very good vintage. A deep flavor to precede dinner, but not overpower it. A light white, I think, to accompany, once we settle at the table.”

Hannibal takes his own glass, and gently touches it to Will’s. They hum in a way that only fine crystal or very thin glass could. Will is almost too afraid to taste it in case it is just as fragile and will break against him and he will have to immediately pay for it with his embarrassment. But Hannibal seems not to have a care for whether or not Will can identify the damned tannins on the wine. He merely smiles when Will takes a sip, and returns to work.

Will pretends not to notice the offer of more wine on top of the single - *one* - glass that he agreed to. Just like he pretends not to notice the precise elegance of the suit that Hannibal wears. Just like he pretends not to notice how very tailored his pants are when Hannibal turns to work from another counter.

Christ.

He resists the urge to first declare that *it has rich notes of grapes* and instead takes another sip, allowing the heat of it to settle his pulse that’s vibrated to the point of becoming a hivelike hum between his ears. It is warm, earthy - when Will allows himself to calm, he finds the curious thought of -

“Mushrooms?”

At this, Hannibal turns to regard him with evident surprise, both brows raised. “Yes. Precisely that. ‘Undergrowth’ is a common note in this particular year. Strange to consider, but not uncommon for a well-aged bordeaux.”

Will sucks the flavor from his bottom lip, as much to hide his grin as to enjoy the wine. The aromas of all the myriad things Hannibal is keeping cooking all at once.

Hannibal.

And as if without reason, he peers into his glass and admits, softly, “I’m glad I came. I mean - thank you for having me. For dinner. For having me over. For dinner.”

"I am glad I could convince you," Hannibal replies, eyes on Will as he considers his wine and does not look up. He is a beautiful man, he is a clever man. He is thinking about every possible scenario as to how this could go. Hannibal wonders how dates had gone for Will before, he wonders how someone could have this man in their home, in their space, and want nothing more than to use him as a middleman for pretentious personal gain.

Although, Hannibal admits, his reasons, perhaps, are rather selfish as well.

A different sort of gain.

A shared gain.

He takes another sip of wine.

"Dinner will be several moments more," Hannibal says at last, pushing himself to straighten, setting his glass to the cool counter, his fingers against the elegant stem in a gentle caress before he lets go. He watches Will respond to the way his hand moves, to the way his body turns as he circles the counter to stand at Will’s side.

He wants to hear him speak again, hear that confidence and cockiness and carefree laxity when he spoke of books before. He taps his fingers against the counter and steps just past him.

"Would you like to see where your gift will find its home?"

Will nods, brows tilting up beneath his still-unruly hair. “Please,” he answers, sliding to stand without - remarkably - tilting over his stool in the process. He takes his wine with him, motioning for Hannibal to lead, so he can follow. And watch.

God, does he ever watch.

“It’s a beautiful home,” Will says. He takes another sip and adds, wry, “I’m guessing this was doctor-money, not coffee shop-money.”

Through the house, immense and well-appointed, without a single stitch out of place. Dark, rich jewel-tones across the furniture, a curious amount of taxidermy that leads Will to wonder if that too is a hobby the man practices, a rather savage counterpoint to his outward refinement. Will begins to feel that he might be much the same, an untidiness incarnate to compliment the precisioned neatness of the man’s home.

His reservations are muffled, as Hannibal takes him to the study. He made his point, stuttering and blushing though it was, that he either works with the man or shares his company as a friend, but not both. And he’s got no compunctions about telling even Hannibal to piss up a rope if he thinks that Will is going to -

- is going to -

“Holy shit,” Will breathes.

It isn’t a study. It’s a goddamn library. Books and books and books, organized and well-kept, none of the familiar scents of foxed paper and aging leather, no dust spinning like snowfall through the low lights. From the shelves - too tall to reach even half of them - on the floor to the higher walkway where more reside, Will looks them all over in a slow circle, blinking wide.

“This is unfair,” he finally manages, choking out a laugh. “Flaunting a swimming pool in front of a man who has to walk miles back and forth to a well each day and usually finds it goddamn dry.”

Hannibal ducks his head, sheepish. His library is one of his favourite rooms, a well-kept and well-stocked collection, the product of years of looking and the discovery of his inheritance once he hit twenty-one. Many of the books are foreign, languages spanning from French to Japanese to something Cyrillic, many are in exceptional condition, bindings not only intact but cared for and oiled. Above them, a thin balcony runs bisecting the room height-wise, a comfortable mezzanine offering access to yet more books, with a crafted wooden ladder to reach it.

"Perhaps consider it an alternative to the well," Hannibal suggests. "An opportunity for a man to experience and enjoy his work... without the work itself clouding his eyes."

He watches Will, can see his adoration for the books themselves, his respect for them, his near-childish delight at seeing so many, in such condition, and offered freely to browse through and read.

Hannibal wonders if Will was the kind of child who hoarded books when he was younger, any and all, carefully stored and kept from damp and use and grubby seeking fingers of his peers.

Will’s cheeks warm at the words, and the consideration behind them. It has been a long time, very long, since he’s looked at books as more than just a means to an end, truly for what they are rather than for rarity and price. He wonders, as he wanders closer to a shelf beside the ladder, if he’s still capable of seeing them as more than that.

“May I?”

“Please.”

Will looks for a place to set his wine and finds it taken by graceful fingers. When they brush his own, it’s electric, sparking across his skin and gathering in a pleasant coil in his belly. He bites his lip, turning his attention towards the shelves, where an almost equal warmth pervades. Breathless, his fingers hover over a copy of de Plancy’s *Dictionnaire Infernal*. He knows it. He knows it immediately and with a lust so intense he’s surprised he doesn’t tent his pants on the spot over it.

“This is -”

“Not a first edition, I’m afraid,” Hannibal remarks, and Will withdraws his hand without touching the book to instead fold his arms across his stomach and laugh.

“No, better. Much better. The sixth, 1863 -”

“Yes.”

“- with Le Breton’s engravings. Christ,” he whispers. “The ones they used for *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, do you have any idea - I didn’t know there were any that aren’t in archives -”

Hannibal's smile warms his face and he tilts his head a little, watching Will nearly vibrate from the proximity to the book. This is the kind of person he is happy to have in his library, to have in his home. To have - in truth, as Hannibal curls his lip between his teeth and then drags it free - in his bed.

"I think this may be the only in a private collection. My father was a collector for years," Hannibal explains. "With his work, he met the right people, acquired some of his most precious books from them. I was merely lucky enough to inherit them from him, building my own collection around it."

He fans his fingers over the stem of the glass he holds and gestures with an elegant hand.

"You are welcome to take it down."

“I -” Will hesitates, glancing towards Hannibal. “I don’t have gloves with me.”

“Even still.”

Will can hardly breathe for the thrill of it. His fingers graze the soft leather of the first volume, no flaking or peeling, the gilt still shining - *gleaming* from the name along the side. It's heavy in his hands, and yet in the care its been shown, feels a fraction of its age, almost new. Will steps to the ladder to let the book rest upon one of the steps, and visibly shivers as he slides it open with a susurrus of pages. Minimal foxing, the usual discoloration one might expect on any book that's almost two centuries old, but the words and engravings are bright black ink against the page and Will could moan for it.

He does, a little, trapping the sound behind his teeth as he bites his lip.

It feels pornographic to touch it, made more wicked by the classifications and images of demons within. And to feel those soft pages beneath his fingers, without protection, seems almost an obscenity. Will forces himself not to think of prices or buyers and instead simply to revel in something so beautifully kept.

He wonders if Hannibal gives such care to everything in his life as this.

"I'm sorry," Will finally murmurs, as bright eyes scan the pages, "about your father."

Hannibal inclines his head to accept the words, turning his eyes away for just a moment before he steps past Will to set the glasses of wine to the large oak desk in the middle of the room.

He allows Will his space with the book, does not disturb or distract him with meaningless conversation. He imagines, instead, the little sounds Will makes magnified in this space, his lips parted wide on little moans of pleasure as Hannibal took him, bent and spread and trembling beneath. He suspects - with a rush of pleasure at the thought - that Will would claw at him in his pleasure, leave marks with pressed nails and harsh fingers, squirm and arch and beg.

Hannibal swallows, just considering how desperately he wants to give Will a good fucking. Someone with a mind to engage with outside of merely shallow praise and wheedling to make themselves known and seen in his presence in hopes of attaining even some of the material possessions he has. No. Will is someone Hannibal would greet with breakfast in bed, worship every inch of in his morning splendor.

Oh, he wants him.

Will loses track of how much time he's spent, shoulders curved and head ducked to take in the fine details of the book. Beyond even the interest in reading it in its original form, he is rapt with appreciation for the thing itself. It is beautiful, preserved to near-newness in spite of insurmountable time, defying the reality of books as Will knows them in their usual appearance.

And it is one.

One volume of two.

One book from one shelf.

From an entire library that a talented, clever, and impossibly handsome man has offered for his perusal. Not to price and sell, not to complete partial collections. To enjoy and savor.

Will hasn't felt this way towards man or book in years.

Carefully, he closes the pages, allowing a breathless little laugh at the soft *flumpf* as it closes. He returns it to its home beside its sibling - both volumes, he has *both* volumes - and almost dizzy, Will tilts himself back towards the ladder and slouches against it, rubbing a hand beneath his glasses.

"You know you'll never be able to get rid of me now, right?"

Hannibal sighs a laugh, warm and pleasant, as he steps closer to Will and resists the urge to press him back against the ladder until he straightens, until he arches up from it.

"I had hoped I could encourage you to stay after dinner," he murmurs, stopping close enough that they are barely a pace apart, Hannibal's hands in his pockets comfortably, entire posture

at ease as he regards Will. "And," he adds, a smile curling his lips when Will looks up at the gentle implication and reminder.

Will takes in the lines of Hannibal's face, high-risen cheekbones and a strong jaw, dark eyes deeply set with a fine fan of wrinkles gathered towards the far corners. Though neatly combed, his hair sweeps just across his brow, and a smile spreads wide lips, beautifully curved. Will gathers his own lower lip between his teeth and releases it with a helpless sigh as his cheeks redden outward down the bridge of his nose and beneath his eyes.

He doesn't want to wait until after dinner.

And from what he can see in every relaxed muscle of the man's posture, neither does Hannibal.

His eyes hood and he leans, a little, to halve the small distance between them. His lips part on another unsteady sigh and he curls his fingers around a ladder step behind him. His heart speeds to carry heat pulsing quick in a staccato that fills his head with white noise.

"And," he agrees.

Hannibal should resist him. Could, in truth, resist him, if he just -

No. He couldn't. Not in any chance in hell or heaven. So he doesn't. He takes the steps needed to close their distance and presses his lips to Will's. Even this, even just this makes Hannibal shiver with the restraint of holding back so long from touching him. This initially grumpy, frumpy, closed-off and proud man who now melts to pliancy beneath him.

Hannibal sets one hand against the rung just above Will's head and his other to Will's neck, curved around it and holding him close.

When they part to breathe, he manages only, "I -" before he is snared by his tie and pulled back into a brutal kiss.

Their noses collide, lips, teeth, tongues, breath - everything all at once. It is clumsy, certainly unpracticed considering the drought in which Will found himself by happenstance, and then in stubbornness decided to stay. But for all of that, the laughs breathed through their noses, the mashed tangle of mouths, it is so wholly welcome a respite that Will could drown on his delight.

He twists Hannibal's tie once tighter around his fist, then again, to bring the taller man against him, feet and legs and shoulders and chest and *there*, pushed together just as firmly. Between them are the sounds of damp kisses clicking and sharp, rattled breaths as both refuse to part enough to breathe. Will lifts a hand, shaking, to sweep Hannibal's hair back from his brow, and as soft strands gather between his fingers, he tightens them to hold Hannibal there, too.

Aggressive, possessive, fucking desperate if Will is being honest, he realizes only how rough he's been when Hannibal's hand spreads a little firmer against his throat as if to seek some distance enough to stop one or both from fainting due to lack of oxygen. It hardly works, Will

moans against Hannibal’s mouth at the feel of fingers over his throat, body rigid with want and embarrassment both, and he snares Hannibal’s lower lip between his teeth to hold.

Their eyes meet, and Will finds no reproach for his forwardness.

So he draws Hannibal’s lip between his own to suck instead.

It is a display of his own wants, taken out on Hannibal, not just shown him. A desire for rough hands and quick mouths and breathless kisses, for being held and being moved. For being *made*.

Hannibal growls, low in his throat, and feels Will return to his fevered grasping again. Hannibal's hand moves from his throat to Will’s hair, curling through it before snaring tight and pulling Will back, surprising and quick enough that Will’s moan pulls loud in the room around them.

Hannibal watches him, hooded eyes and parted lips, and smiles. He ducks his head to kiss Will’s frantic pulse, to show just the hint of teeth and feel Will shiver against him before he sets his foot against the ladder as though to climb free.

No. No, no, he will not let that man escape him, not now. Not when Will’s entire body screams to be touched and explored. Not when his entire being begs to be used and given pleasure almost to the point of pain. Hannibal aches for him.

Will does not yield easily. Not because he doesn't want this - oh, he *does* - but because the consummation, now far less in doubt, will be that much sweeter for the struggle. He shoves his foot against the ladder again and finds a firm hand on his knee to push it back down. Will shudders, moaning - laughing - and bends at the knees to lower himself beneath the onslaught of Hannibal's mouth and hands, and to shove himself up to standing once more and feel the weight and strength of the man trying to pin him in place.

Hannibal is every bit as powerful as Will all-too-frequently imagined. This sweet and funny man who carves tomatoes into roses and paints leaves with milk, with his soft smile and gentle demeanor - he is hard hands and harder muscle. Growling as if in primal warning, he catches Will's wrist in his hand and pins it above his head. His teeth draw firm enough to bruise across Will's throat.

Will's voice cracks when he moans. He shoves his body forward against the tidal surge of Hannibal's own, to buck him free and feel their growing groins rub painful friction together. The former is not a success, but yields more of the latter when Hannibal traps Will under him, ladder steps digging painful into his spine. Will isn't used to this anymore, and really, he's not sure he's ever had it quite so good already. They're always either too hesitant - which ruins the illusion - or too selfish, which isn't any better. He imagined Hannibal might be like this, he certainly fucking hoped, but -

Hannibal snares Will by the jaw, just hard enough to force his attention back from straying. Dark eyes search across Will's face and Will feels his lips part in obedience well before a deep, hungry kiss twists across them and Hannibal's tongue fills his mouth.

Hannibal is enthralled by him. The way he shivers and twists, delighting in his own submission but far from simpering in it. Will fights this to feel restrained, manipulates Hannibal as much as the other does him. Playful and clever and strong, and knowing what he wants even when he doesn't have the experience or confidence to ask for it the proper way.

Feeling Will rut against him is certainly enough.

Hannibal presses forward, rocks his hips against Will’s and swallows his moan, deep enough to stir his bones and vibrate against Hannibal’s chest.

Hannibal wants to know how far he can bend before he breaks, so he knows never to break him. He wants Will more with every moment spent pressed to his hammering heart and groped by seeking hands.

He pulls back only with a titanic effort, snaring Will against the jaw once more before gently turning his head and cupping his cheek instead. Pressing a surprisingly tender kiss to the corner of his mouth, he rubs his nose against his cheek in a claiming, warm motion.

"After dinner," Hannibal reminds him, tone low and pleased. His fingers move up to gently adjust Will’s glasses on his face again to sit properly. He watches him, the want there, the nervousness that should this end now it will never start again. Hannibal strokes through Will’s hair and tugs it gently again. A reminder, perhaps.

"It would be inconceivably rude to invite you to my bed without dinner first."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> *“You never want sweets when you come into the shop,” Hannibal reminds him.*
>
> *“I don’t like sweet things for lunch, lunch isn’t dessert -”*
>
> *“And how about breakfast?”*
>
> *“Breakfast is fine for sweet things, sometimes, depends on what it is and - oh,” Will sighs. He laughs, grinning wide and shaking his head. “Breakfast.”*

Chapter Notes

> Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

Cruel isn’t a word that would have readily come to mind when Will thought of Hannibal in the weeks they’ve known each other, but he’s not displeased to find it added to the descriptors already in play.

Will flinches as he settles into his seat for dinner, still hard enough that it hurts like a bruise in his belly to do so. It’ll ease, he hopes, but he finds he minds it less when he sees Hannibal walking just as stiffly to serve dinner, cock pressed in a rigid line to the front of his tidy trousers. Will tries to hide a grin behind his hand, but it narrows his eyes and Hannibal squints his own, in turn.

“I don’t know what’s worse,” Will snorts. “That you’re making me wait to get back to you, or that I have to wait to get back to your books.”

Hannibal’s lips quirk and he gives Will a wry look before setting his plate before him. It is presented as anything in his cafe is, like a work of art that has Will debating whether he would rather eat or look at it.

“Portobello mushroom with parmesan-herb stuffing, autumn vegetables and fresh green salad.” And, it seems, balsamic vinegar and sea salt to decorate, cast upon the plate as though entirely thoughtlessly, though Will knows it is simply a testament to Hannibal’s practiced hand that it looks entirely effortless.

“I did not want to risk upsetting my guest with a meat dish, should you have proven to be pescetarian only,” Hannibal tells him, bringing his own dish to the table before leaving to take a bottle of white wine from the fridge, two glasses from the cabinet. He pours both and takes them with him to set before Will and hold his own as he still stands.

Will holds his breath. He takes in the length of Hannibal before him, and Hannibal’s length further down. Unable to resist, Will presses his tongue between his lips to part them damp, and crooks a brow.

“Your fault,” Will reminds him.

“My choice,” corrects Hannibal, but not without a rueful amusement. Will watches in visible delight as Hannibal eases down to sit, the only sign of his discomfort a quick twitch of muscle in the corner of his cheek. Muffling a snorted laugh behind his hand, Will lifts his glass.

“Cheers, then. May all our choices be so promising,” Will says, and goddamn if he’s not pleased to have enough blood flow to his brain to still manage something that sounds vaguely clever. He takes a sip as Hannibal does, and lifts his utensils. “I prefer fish. I do - fish, I mean - when it’s season and I have a spare weekend, but,” Will hesitates, lifting his chin and looking down his nose as he sets silverware to mushroom. “I do enjoy meat.”

Hannibal watches him, taking up his own cutlery with a smile. “Noted,” he says, tone entirely too warm, entirely too pleased. They could have gone upstairs together without this, could have fallen into bed and - Hannibal just sighs thinking about it. Soon. Soon they would, he is certain. But this… this makes it more than just a quick much-needed fuck for them both.

And he wants more, if he’s honest. Whatever *more* either and both can manage. He enjoys Will’s company, his mind, his quick wit and his entire bearing. Beautiful as he is when he is shy, Will is nothing short of stunning when he is confident. When he speaks of books or allows himself to enjoy them without business clouding his mind. When he pulls himself up against Hannibal in want for a stronger hand.

Lord.

Hannibal sets a piece of mushroom between his lips and savors the taste. Smokey, sharp from the cheese and the herbs, beautifully soft. He hums, watches Will take another bite of his own dinner, watches the way his expression changes to one of contemplative pleasure. It always does, when Hannibal brings him something new. New coffee, new sweet, new lunch that he makes specifically for Will, and no one else.

“You go somewhere else,” he notes, “when you allow yourself to taste.”

Blue eyes alight to consider Hannibal, to watch him bring a speared leaf of salad past his lips. Will smiles, and finds it less a strain to do so than it’s been in far too long. To the contrary, they come readily and quickly when he is able to steal time with Hannibal apart from their busy workdays. And now, here, the idea that they might talk at length, enjoy at length, and do a great deal more - at long, hard length - is enough to overwhelm in a wonderful way.

“I didn’t grow up with anything like this. Maybe, you know, mushrooms on pizza - the flavorless little white ones. Not flavorless. Dirt-flavored.”

Hannibal breathes a laugh, as Will sips his wine.

“My father worked, a lot,” Will continues. “Enough to keep us both fed, so we were lucky, but - you know. White bread and hot dogs. Ordinary things. It’s fortunate when I get to try something interesting,” Will allows, a gentle compliment couched in his words. “Trying to understand what makes it special is the least I can do.”

He finds his anxiety and pulse - and his erection - settling from their previous frenzy, and asks, “Where did you learn? You must have gone to school for it.”

Hannibal hums. “You will laugh,” he says, “but I started with desserts. Many a night of late study sessions with a group, I would make something to keep morale up, to have us remain awake as we tested ourselves on anatomy and neurobiology and the cardiovascular system.” He pauses to take another bite, to take a sip of wine and savor the mix of flavors. To savor the way Will looks at him as he eats, entirely attentive, genuinely interested.

“Soon my cooking notebook was more full than my study pages. I spent a semester considering that perhaps I had chosen the wrong field. People enjoyed my baking, and I lost myself in it entirely, no stress, no fear, no invasive and unnecessary memories,” Hannibal purses his lips and continues. “I did not do well that fall semester. But I learned to integrate my passion for cooking with my studies. I applied my passion to my work for as long as I felt it necessary, and then I moved on to work in my field of passion.”

It seems so long-winded, and Hannibal hardly ever tells the story, to anyone. It is easier to pretend he is a gifted chef by merely being one, that he did not take his share of burns and scrapes and awful concoctions before he figured out how his own personal style would work with the food he was creating.

Will doesn’t ask about the briefly mentioned memories. Nevermind that they’re so close to prying physically, it’s rude to pry emotionally, at least so soon. Later, maybe, if things go well. Later, maybe, if things last at all beyond tonight. He allows another warm little smile instead. It’s sweet to imagine Hannibal being swept away like that, turning pages in a text book with one hand as he turns a cookbook page with the other. The thought of the focus involved in surgery or baking draws Will’s breath a little short, not in lust but in something closer to admiration.

Affection, maybe.

“Saving lives and filling bellies,” Will murmurs. “Are you always so benevolent?”

Hannibal lifts a brow, and from no more than that look, Will feels his scalp prickle and cascade in a shiver down his spine. The memory of his curls pulled straight in fierce hands, the stern shove of his leg back off the ladder, rough words sighed against his skin to *go* and to *do*...

Okay, so maybe Will’s cock isn’t softening at all.

“I wish I had hobbies - of course, it feels dismissive to call *this* a hobby,” Will snorts, motioning towards the plate. “But I wish I had time for anything so - I don’t know. Fucking useful. Old rancid books and their old rancid owners. Fishing. My dogs. That’s about it.”

Hannibal’s brow lifts. “You have pets.”

The mild terror that appears and then shutters cold in Will’s dry look makes it clear that he wishes he hadn’t fucking mentioned it. A deal-breaker, more often than not, any time - and there haven’t been many times - that he’s managed to convince someone over to his house. Better to break it off early, then, he figures. The dogs will still be there, anyway, and no less happy to fill the empty space in Will’s bed.

“Dogs,” Will answers. “Seven.”

Hannibal laughs, and it’s such a bright and pleased sound that Will blinks a minute, trying to see through it to the displeasure beneath that just isn’t there.

“Seven?”

“Strays.”

“They must keep you busy.” Hannibal keeps his eyes on Will as he eats, as Will considers his answer and tries to hide his smile. In truth, Hannibal has never had a desire for a companion animal, let alone multiple, but there is an undeniable calm that pervades them, that seeps through them to the humans who interact with them or live with them. “Can I ask why seven?”

“I had six,” Will laughs, shaking his head, gesturing that there is more to that answer. “I had six, the seventh found me. They all found me, if I’m honest. One after another, at the time that was most convenient for them.”

“That sounds like almost catlike behavior,” Hannibal smiles, sets his knife down to take up his glass, eyes narrowed over it as he regards his date. And it is a date, at least, he hopes it is. He hopes it is one of many dates.

“Except they’re actually friendly and they listen,” Will grins in response. He tries to mute it behind a sip of wine, but the amusement - the genuine and surprised delight - lingers. “Ever caught a stray cat?”

Hannibal’s lips quirk higher. “I have not.”

“Neither have I,” Will says. “And not for lack of trying.”

“Would you keep them, too, if you did?”

“Are you asking me if I hoard animals?” Will asks, but there’s no rancor in his question. Okay, maybe a little rancor, but just the baseline rancor that snarls everything he says, even as his smile widens. “Only books.”

“And seven dogs.”

“They picked me, I didn’t ask for this,” Will insists. “Anyway, the company’s nice. They keep me busy. They make the house feel full, you know. Positive energy instead of,” he sighs, waving a hand slightly before - daring - he lets it come to rest precariously close to Hannibal’s on the table. Fingertips - *cells*, really - touching, but no more than that. “Instead of just emptiness.”

Hannibal does not hesitate, as Will did, and shifts his fingers to rest against the other man’s, content to keep that contact as he seeks the last of the vegetables on his plate with his fork alone.

“Dogs are known for it,” Hannibal agrees. “Positive energy. There was, for a time, a dog that would assist with my therapy, when I worked with children. Without saying a word, that dog would get more from them than I ever could with my education behind me.” He smiles, eyes narrowing at Will who just looks at him, still split between disbelief and a primal sort of *need*. Hannibal can certainly relate to the latter.

And dinner is nearly over.

Hannibal draws his thumb gently over the tips of Will’s fingers.

“Would it be rude of me,” Hannibal asks, tone warming once more, “to suggest dessert for another time?”

Will bites his bottom lip and grins. All at once, the brief maudlin weight that settled like wet wool over his shoulders is gone. All at once, his heart trips faster and his blood plummets to gather in his cock. It makes him dizzy, like an elevator dropping too quickly. He lifts a fingertip, nail scraping soft against the movement of Hannibal thumb.

“And after all that talk about how good it is,” Will sighs.

Sighing, laughing, dismayed and pleased all at once, Hannibal presses his thumb down a little firmer against Will’s wriggling fingertips. It’s a scant motion, just a muscle, but the sensation of it makes the smaller man shiver.

“You never want sweets when you come into the shop,” Hannibal reminds him.

“I don’t like sweet things for lunch, lunch isn’t dessert -”

“And how about breakfast?”

“Breakfast is fine for sweet things, sometimes, depends on what it is and - oh,” Will sighs. He laughs, grinning wide and shaking his head. “Breakfast.”

Hannibal hums, and Will lifts his eyes above his glasses. He wants. He needs. He feels in every muscle in his body a primal, animal drive to be conquered and mated and held down and *fucked*, truly *fucked* by someone strong and capable.

And Hannibal is certainly that.

“I -” Will breathes, swallowing so hard his throat clicks. “Should we -”

“We should.”

“But before -”

“Now?”

“Or never,” Will breathes, and burning with a blush, he asks, in rapid succession. “Do you have an ex-wife? Or ex-husband. Or more than one. Or an ex-engaged-to-be-a-spouse. Or any fucked-up exes in general that I need to worry about. Do you have kids? Do you want kids? Are you clean? And when was your last partner? And - protection, fucking - dull,” Will sighs, pressing his free hand to his eyes beneath his glasses in a grimace, pained by his own tedium.

Hannibal smiles, pushes himself to stand and pulls Will with him by his hand, around the side of the table to his chest.

“No ex-spouse,” he confirms, walking backwards as Will slowly follows, step by step. “I am not engaged, nor do I have any ex-partners who would find our union this evening worth their ire.” Hannibal’s grin is sudden, surprising. “In this country,” he adds, and Will laughs, nervous, despite himself, so Hannibal kisses him.

It is not as deep as the kisses before, but just as hot, just as immediately gripping, and Will makes a sound. Hannibal’s hands slip down to rest against Will’s waist as he starts to walk again, fingers working to pull his shirt carefully from his pants, head ducked to watch.

“I have no children, I have not often thought of having any, but I am not averse.” His lips part as he touches Will’s bare skin with his fingertips, and the man before him shivers, twists when it tickles, and promptly presses Hannibal against the nearest wall to kiss him again. Hannibal lets him, hands gathering Will’s shirt over his wrists as he pushes his palms up against his back.

“I’m clean,” he whispers, breathless, as Will kisses him again. He frees his hand and grasps Will’s hair again to twist and pull him back, breaths shared, forehead to forehead as Hannibal’s lip lifts just enough to show his teeth.

Predatory.

Dangerous.

Fucking hot as all hell.

“Rude, Will,” he sighs, “shockingly rude. But if your curiosity will not rest… years,” he breathes, pulling Will back just a little harder as his free hand comes up to work the buttons on his shirt. “And years.” Down to splay a wide palm over Will’s cock, trapped in his pants, still. “And years ago.”

Hannibal hums, licks his lower lip into his mouth. “I want you,” he says, “very much.”

Will would be struck by the unfairness of it, typically. That Hannibal, *this* Hannibal, whose skilled surgeon-chef fingers tickle just right against the throbbing length of Will’s cock,

whose home and business and food and life are all beautiful, who is warm and funny and a little strange - just enough to be an absolute fascination - should have gone *years*...

For Will it makes sense that he's gone so long without. Failed relationships, each one predicted by his uncanny awareness of the moment that a partner began to lose interest, lead to stopping the whole miserable experience altogether.

But for Hannibal…

At least, that's how Will would be struck, if he weren't nearly doubled-over by Hannibal's hands against his body, and his reassurances sighed against his skin. He is, though, he is conquered entirely right now and he lifts his eyes without bothering to erect a shield first. Not now, not tonight.

When their mouths meet, it is starlight and open sky, without any walls between them.

Will fans his fingers across Hannibal's cheeks and goes willingly when Hannibal turns his back to the wall. He snares a heel around Hannibal's calf and curls his hips into the firm hand that grips his cock hard enough that Will breaks their kiss on a moan. Pushing his hands back, he avoids the snare of snapping teeth and a vicious grin, and snatches Hannibal's straight strands between his fingers instead, pulling back his head enough to see his throat jerk when he swallows.

Will's kiss brushes feather-soft across Hannibal's pulse, and he whispers, "I want you to have me."

He is exquisite, he is fragile, he trembles against Hannibal's hands as he peels his shirt from him and it drops to the floor, unminded. Will can't remember the last time he felt this wanted. For more than his skill in acquiring and selling, for more than just a favor, for more than just a fuck. Hannibal seems to want every aspect of him, from stubborn displeasure to soft sighs.

Will is happy to allow him that.

More than.

He curls a hand in Hannibal's tie and tugs him closer again, kissing him as he works it free. Hannibal groans when he feels Will's fingers against his shirt, fanning against his skin, catching against the hair on his chest and Hannibal moans deeper for the feeling. Both are breathless, both keep kissing regardless, and Hannibal wonders if they could even make it to the couch, now, let alone upstairs to the bedroom.

But he will not have Will think this a simple scratching of an itch, he will not have their first time together be on the sofa. He wants Will spread beneath him in his bed, he wants to remember how he looks curled there in pleasure after Hannibal fucks him like he wants to be fucked, like he deserves to be fucked. Hard and relentless and deep and enough for him to limp the next morning, when he goes downstairs.

Yes.

Just like that.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

“I’m -”

“Incredibly charming,” Hannibal reassures him, hands folding together in scarce restraint as Will rights himself and they continue upstairs with slow, dueling steps.

“Very bad at this -”

“At convincing me that you are not *charming? That is unfortunately true.”*

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks to Noodle for her amazing beta skills!

"Up -" Hannibal gasps, smiling when Will draws his nails down his chest. "Upstairs."

Will sucks the taste of Hannibal’s lips from his own, and tilts his head aside. Long fingers spread through his chest hair. They close to trap the curls between and tug, pawing at the man but as gently as he might handle one of his books - with care and reverence for the rarity of this opportunity.

That’s as long as it lasts though, before Will leans up to snatch another kiss from the man. Another, another, teeth and lips and stroking tongues as he makes his way carefully backwards up the stairs. Blue eyes narrow in delight as he realizes that standing this way, he’s taller than Hannibal now, and a shiver ricochets through him when Hannibal’s gaze makes him feel that much smaller for it.

Long, slow steps, come-hither moans and punctuated with kisses, Will makes his way upstairs, and when he finally trips, stumbling but not quite falling, at least he manages to catch himself on the bannister.

“I’m -”

“Incredibly charming,” Hannibal reassures him, hands folding together in scarce restraint as Will rights himself and they continue with slow, dueling steps.

“Very bad at this -”

“At convincing me that you are *not* charming? That is unfortunately true.”

“But,” Will smirks, settling his glasses on his nose, and glancing over his shoulder - *looking* this time - to make sure he doesn’t trip again as he reaches the second floor.

“But?”

At the top of the stairs, Will stops and tilts his gaze down at Hannibal. He runs a hand through his silky hair and tightens it into a fist, just enough to pull, not enough to truly hurt. Bending their mouths together, Will sighs, blushing.

“There are certain things that I’m *very* good at.”

Hannibal parts his lips with his tongue and smiles up at Will, two steps above and holding him not only in hand but also in thrall. For a good long while, Hannibal suspects. The thought is entirely too pleasing.

“Oh,” Hannibal murmurs, setting a hand against Will’s warm bare side and stroking up to hold just under his arm. “Of that I have no doubt.” His thumb circles a nipple, presses against it until it peaks. He accepts another kiss as Will tugs him up one step, then another, to stand before him again.

Hannibal cannot remember the last time he was so distracted getting to the bedroom with a lover. He feels like a teenager, fumbling for something and delighted when he manages to get it to work. Kissing every few seconds, every few steps. He is giddy with it, and when he grins at Will, the other blushes in the most fetching, sweet way - still determined to convince himself this is fleeting, that everything he is doing is wrong or unattractive when it is anything but.

“Actions speak louder than words, Will,” he teases.

Will doesn’t turn to walk down the hall - he moves backwards with steady steps, one for one with Hannibal’s slow stalking. A quick glance aside reveals the bedroom, bathed in deep blues and just as perfectly tidy as the rest of the house. Will envies and resents it all at once, admires it and wants nothing more than to see his own clothes scattered everywhere.

He will make a mess of the man, of that he’s certain. But who will undo the other first remains to be decided.

Hannibal lingers in the doorway, elbows braced against the frame, and Will shivers at the sensation of feeling suddenly cornered and half-bare. Hannibal’s shirt hangs from his frame, most of the buttons free and revealing the thick carpet of hair beneath. Lip between his teeth, Will steps forward, small things, and setting his hands to Hannibal’s pants, he turns his cheek against the soft fluff, nuzzling into Hannibal’s heat.

“This is,” Will murmurs, his mouth tickled by the man’s chest hair. “This is fantastic.”

Hannibal hums, enough that it’s almost a growl, and rocks his hips up against Will’s hands as they work over his belt. There is something so primal about the way he rubs up against him,

something so needy and submissive and demanding all at once. Hannibal imagines there will be marks on both of them in the morning.

Gently, Hannibal removes Will's glasses before they can smear or fall and get damaged. He sets them to the small table in the corridor and remains as he is, boxing Will in in the bedroom, keeping his prize where he wants it to be, still so confused as to why Will does not see himself the same.

Worthy.

Wanted.

Needed.

Hannibal groans when Will's fingers reach in to circle around him, leans in to nuzzle their noses together as Will curses and draws an inevitable smile from Hannibal at the words.

"It - you -" Will lifts his eyes, blinking wide as he refocuses on Hannibal so close. He breathes a laugh as if startled. "It just keeps going."

Hannibal's smile widens to a grin breaks into a moan when Will shoves his hand all the way into Hannibal's underpants. He forces down his trousers but not the briefs, watching the way the fabric stretches when he rubs his palm and fingers straight up and down the very stiff, very *thick*, substantial, girthy -

Will could keep going.

Instead he just moans, pressing his voice to Hannibal's cheek. He curves his hand against Hannibal's cock, not to stroke but to take in the weighty size of it, pulsing back into his hand. He teases upward, eyes darting down to see the tip slicked clear with precome, trapped under the waistband of Hannibal's briefs, and when he lifts his eyes again it's a very wicked look indeed.

Right there in the doorway, Will lowers to his knees. He reveals Hannibal in inches, lips parted against his cock when it slips free to rest full and fat against his cheek, turning his lips to meet it. It's more than Will had imagined in his more cautious masturbatory excursions. Exactly what he imagined in his wilder ones. The musky, masculine scent of sweat and semen dizzies him. He is unsurprised to find Hannibal intact - he had assumed as much from his scant encounters with men who were not American - and delighted at the softness of the man's foreskin beneath his languid kisses.

He sucks against the side of Hannibal's cock, tongue curling beneath it, and training his eyes upward, works his way lazily towards the tip.

Hannibal releases a long-held breath and curls his fingers against the doorframe, before ducking his head to look at Will kneeling in front of him. He had imagined, often enough to be embarrassing, truly, how Will would look on his knees. Brought there by his own desire, never by Hannibal's force. It had always been a particular favourite image in Hannibal's

wondrously extensive collection, and nothing, *nothing* compares to seeing Will this way before him now.

No longer a fantasy, but a tangible, beautiful thing.

With hot tongue and soft sounds and little nuzzling, and Hannibal cannot take his eyes off him as Will familiarizes himself with his cock, eyes blown wide and lips eager. Hannibal can see how Will's own cock tents his pants, how his legs are set wider for it, how his back arches with the motion and Hannibal moans again, even before Will's fingers come up to slip back the foreskin and he sucks against the sensitive head.

"Will." Hannibal drops one hand to slip through the messy curls, fingers splaying out and curling up again in time with Will's languid pulls of his lips. It's so lazy, and there is something, some deeply primal thing, that has Hannibal trembling with anticipation for more. This, he realizes, this is something Will is certainly good at, and this is hardly even the start of a show for him.

Will could content himself with this all night. All day. Weeks. Forever, probably, forever spent with his lips swelling damp from sucking Hannibal's cock. Forever with soft skin and rigidity filling his mouth and stretching his jaw. Forever dripping against the back of his tongue and down his throat as he tries to take Hannibal deeper still.

When he chokes a little, a rare fucking thing considering Will's aptitude at this, he is delighted, and it shows in a quick narrowing of eyes as they flicker upward. Even buried to the back of his throat, there are still inches left untamed, and Will wants all of them. He rubs his palm between his legs to ease his own erection, really just making it worse, before he sets his hands to Hannibal's thick, bare thighs.

Hannibal moans at the movement of Will's tongue as he adjusts, and were his mouth not stuffed to near-drooling with cock, Will would laugh.

He's only getting started.

As if on cue from the man's vocalizations, Will hollows his cheeks to suck. He pulls back long and slow for Hannibal to see just how much of his dick Will is taking already, to see that soft skin pulled tight and shining with spit. Until just the tip hangs hot between Will's lips, until Hannibal's breath hitches short to be sucked in such a sensitive place, and then down again, faster, bobbing as if he could somehow by force alone take Hannibal all the way to the hilt.

God knows he's going to try.

Hannibal drops his head back with a breathless laugh, body alive with sensation and damn near overwhelmed by it. Will's mouth is heaven, practiced and perfect, tongue and lips and teeth. Hannibal marvels at him, this quiet and beautiful man who takes cock like he makes a living doing it. He cannot fathom that Will is alone, has been alone, that someone would pass up his mind, his body, his fucking *mouth* and not regret it.

Hannibal's fingers twist hard in Will's hair and the moan that this elicits vibrates down to Hannibal's bones.

"Fuck." It's sighed, throat clicking and lips parting and eyes closed. "Oh, Will -"

The promises Hannibal could make, how he will pin Will to the bed and spread him wide, how he will hold him down as he eats him out, letting Will raise his hips so he can see him leaking from the want for more. How Hannibal will push in, slow, deep enough to have Will arch and bed and claw at the sheet and claw back at Hannibal's skin. Slow, slow to stretch, a tease until Will begs - he will, Hannibal is certain - until he pleads and then loses his words entirely as Hannibal takes him properly.

Will chokes again and Hannibal nearly comes then and there, grasping Will's hair to pull him off and back. Spit joins them in long trails, from Hannibal's cock to Will's parted lips, made scarlet by his sucking. Will starts to reach to wipe them away but finds he's brought to his feet again by a quick jerk that does not bring a yelp of pain but a moan, before Hannibal crushes his mouth against Will's instead.

"I could take all of it," Will hisses, grinning, before Hannibal silences him with another ferocious kiss. Stumbling back towards the bed, Will fumbles open the rest of the buttons of Hannibal's shirt, shoving it back from his shoulders before working his own pants open as Hannibal steps out of his own. Will's own cock, by compare, is average - unremarkable, really, curving stiff up towards his belly and lacking the length and girth of Hannibal's own substantial stiffness, but when Hannibal takes him in hand to stroke, both are certain they've never felt anything so satisfying.

The bed comes up behind Will's legs and he staggers back to sit on it, pushing away from the onslaught of hands and mouth, laughing when he's allowed to breathe. He scrambles as if to escape, catching Hannibal's lips with his teeth, snarling. He can hardly think that this, this is the charming, quiet man with a quaint little cafe who likes making art with his food. It's nearly enough to make him come with that thought alone.

Hannibal follows, quick hands and pleased grin, and when he manages to pin Will beneath him - wrists against the sheets, knees held wide by Hannibal's own - he just watches him, breathless and blushing and smiling. Then he leans closer, pressing his weight down against Will who continues to squirm pleasantly beneath him.

"Stay still."

Will's immediate reaction is to shake his head, so he doesn't fight it. Biting his lip, his grin widens and he squirms again, trying to draw his legs up, or flex his hands free, simply to feel himself held in place like this. Nevermind that he's nearly forty, nevermind that he's had plenty of partners come and go, often literally just that. Nevermind that Will isn't exactly lacking strength, from the long runs he takes in the morning and hefting boxes of books around all day. It's too good, to resist and be made captive like this.

Hannibal is too good.

"No," Will whispers, petulant and delighted.

“Rude,” Hannibal murmurs, but his smile is impossible to ignore, impossible to wipe from his face, so he presses it to Will’s cheek instead, shifting to rub up against the man beneath him. It pulls a groan from them both, a soft huff of laughter when Will tries to stretch his arms up higher above his head to escape that way.

Hannibal kisses down his throat, to his chest and over a nipple before taking it between his teeth to gently tug.

Will is not fragile, he is not a glass figurine to tend to and never touch. He is a man who moans and swears and arches up against Hannibal’s mouth for more, a man who twists his wrists until one pulls free to draw nails down Hannibal’s back and tug his hair. Hannibal cannot get enough of him.

When he sets his teeth against Will’s nipple, the man shivers. When he sucks it, Will nearly bends from the bed, sensitive to the point of trembling from it. He doesn’t stop, not when a flick of his tongue across it makes Will swear and a soft breath cooling against damp, pebbled skin makes him thrust his cock up against Hannibal’s belly. He lifts his eyes as he kisses the smooth plane of Will’s chest to the other side, and Will pleads in mutters and laughs for him to stop. Hannibal pauses, but Will’s startled gaze is entirely expectant, and as Hannibal sets his lips to the man’s nipple not yet tended to, Will’s eyes roll closed with a groan.

“Bastard,” Will laughs, tugging hard at Hannibal’s hair. It pulls a growl from the man sucking at his chest and Will hikes a leg across his waist, the tip of his cock jutting against Hannibal’s belly and skimming dampness across it. “How - how in the hell -”

A curious sound from Hannibal, pressed against Will’s nipple, rips another shuddering moan from him and Will laughs again, weaker now, trembling along the length of his body.

“*Years?*” Will asks, in disbelief and pleasure both.

Hannibal laughs, biting deliberately hard just to feel Will jerk from it and curse him again. There is something delightful, exceptional, at being so hated while being so desired, it’s intoxicating. It’s addicting.

“I suppose I am out of practice then,” Hannibal laments, drawing his tongue long over Will’s nipple again before letting him go and snaring his hips, pushing up to turn him over before Will can even register the movement. A sharp spank against his thigh is enough to pull a laugh from Will before Hannibal hoists his hips up higher.

“May need to experiment.” It’s almost thoughtful, if the grin wasn’t riding hot on the words before Hannibal draws his face down Will’s spine and kisses the little nub of his tailbone.

Will pushes his voice into the pillow he grips beneath him, a delightful minor victory in usurping the tidiness of Hannibal’s bed. He turns to look back over his shoulder, and splays his knees wider as if to avoid Hannibal’s mouth, only to find his hips jerked high again. No one has ever handled Will like this, how he’s always wanted to be moved around and positioned and used and spent. No one has ever done it with as much affection and brusqueness, tangled together into soft kisses and hard hands.

By the time he touches another kiss, to one cheek, then the other, Will feels all but drunk on him.

“Using me for fucking practice,” Will snorts, forcing his grin into a feigned scowl. “And for practice fucking,” he amends.

“Certainly for the latter,” Hannibal agrees, biting playfully against the soft skin of Will’s ass. “Often and hard, I hope. Until the practice pays off and I can fuck you regularly and thoroughly and drive you mad every time.”

The words are so casually spoken, almost bored. Will turns his head to protest when Hannibal presses his thumbs to his cheeks to spread him wide, and leans in to suck a kiss against Will’s hole, moaning his own pleasure at the decision before Will can even find breath to make a sound.

So there is no sound, but for Hannibal’s own hum and the slick sound of suction against Will’s opening. He gasps, little and desperate, fingers splaying into the sheets, and holds his breath so long he nearly goes faint for it before Hannibal relents to lick instead, and Will’s voice bursts from him in a flurry of foul words moaned beautifully against the pillow. He twists forward, overwhelmed by how fucking good it feels, and finds his thighs held in place by big, strong hands that stop him from squirming away.

Hannibal keeps himself between Will’s cheeks, savoring the taste of him, soap from his shower and sweat from after, lapping long broad strokes before closing into another kiss. Will clutches the pillow beneath himself, thrusting against empty air and shoving himself back against Hannibal’s mouth. It’s too much and not enough all at once, adoration for the rough treatment outweighing his resentment that Hannibal could be so fucking perfect.

Will tries to look over his shoulder but can’t see more than the side of the man’s bare body, coiled strong where he kneels, and a tousled sweep of blonde hair where Hannibal has buried his face. He imagines, instead, whimpering at how Hannibal must look there, all serene patience and damp lips, hooded eyes and flushed cheeks as he touches flirtatious little kisses against Will’s hole.

It’s obscene and wonderful and Will mutters, muffled, “Fucking - stop, Christ, you’ll make me -”

“Make you?”

The question sighs cool air over wet skin and Will laughs, desperate and choking.

“Fucking come all over your fancy sheets, goddammit -”

“Good,” is all Hannibal tells him, pressing in deeper, this time, tongue pushing past the squeezing, quivering ring of muscle as Will whimpers another volley of curses against the bed. This, Hannibal has enjoyed ever since someone similarly held him down and subjected him to it. He remembers his own curses and pleas, the way his entire body felt like water, hot and cold and hot again, shivers up and down his spine, lungs too small for air… knowing he

is bringing that pleasure to Will, now, and that he can, again, makes Hannibal moan low against Will.

He slaps him playfully against the ass again when Will tries to wriggle free.

“Already learning so much,” Hannibal purrs against him, leaning in to lap quick tickling little licks against Will’s ass. “Just from reminding you to be good.”

Will reaches for him, lips curved across clenched teeth, but with Hannibal holding him firmly in place, he can’t quite reach his hair. He snorts, laughing, as he tries and his fingers tighten to a fist as Hannibal plunges his tongue deep again in retribution. This time, Will moans his name, drawled long and aching, and it’s enough to twist Hannibal’s voice into a ferocious little growl.

Will turns his cheek against the pillow, seeking cool to ease his blush, sighing long as Hannibal relents. It’s only then that Hannibal catches Will by his ankles and pulls him flat onto the bed in one smooth jerk. Will sputters and twists, but doesn’t have time to get himself turned over before Hannibal spreads long across his back. His chest hair tickles enough to spill goosebumps across Will’s skin, his cock - his enormous and, Will now knows, entirely delicious cock - rubs between Will’s damp cheeks.

“Do it,” Will breathes, clutching the pillow with both hands. “Please, just -”

Hannibal rocks up again and Will moans, lips stretching in a grin as he shivers and seeks back for more, his own cock trapped against the sheets with a thread count so high Will doesn’t even want to consider it, rubbing wet marks against the dark fabric.

Hannibal could be content to rut against Will this way until they are both spent, content to turn him over and kiss him breathless, have his lips and tongue bitten for the trouble, his back scratched for the effort. It would be perfect. But with Will beneath him arching as he is, aching and begging and *needing* to be fucked...

“You won’t walk straight tomorrow,” Hannibal muses, kissing against Will’s shoulder and pressing against him more, closer, brushing against his hole now, as -

As Will reaches back and grabs Hannibal by the hair, enough to make the man wince.

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Will mutters.

“Will -”

Hannibal’s voice is patient, patient despite Will twisting his head aside and squirming, unable to free himself but deliberately, reluctantly - oh god, reluctantly - moving himself away from the tip of Hannibal’s cock. He releases his hair with a huff, pulse all but vibrating with want for this. Will grinds himself against the sheets again and again, long slow strokes.

“You will do that,” Will decides. “You’ll fuck me until I have to eat breakfast standing up. With a condom, for now. Christ,” he sighs, grimacing at his own habits, too long ingrained. Does it matter? Really, does it? It’s not as if he’s been sleeping around - either of them,

apparently, and not for lack of trying - but for God's sake, he's still just the goddamn coffee shop owner.

"Condom," Will mumbles again, voice muffled where he buries his face in despair into his pillow. "But if you want to come on me when you're done, you can. You should. Do that."

"Should I?" Hannibal's tone is gentle, nuzzling up against Will as he arches up the bed and reaches for the bottom drawer of his bedside table. He pulls free a foil packet, kept there in the vain hope, perhaps, that he would need it and thanking his own compulsions that he *did*. Because he does. And he will need to go to the store later to replenish the meagre little collection of three in there when he feels he can actually leave Will's side and not immediately want to cling to him again.

Maybe in a few days.

He draws the little thing down Will's side so he can feel, know that it hardly bothers Hannibal - he actually finds it entirely charming - that Will is determined to stay safe. Then he sits up, opens the slippery thing and rolls the condom down onto himself with stuttered breaths and heavy thick swallows, holding himself back so he doesn't spill before he's had a chance to fuck Will properly.

And he will, God, he will.

Another kiss against Will's back is met with a half-hearted grunt of displeasure, though his smile pulls the corners of his eyes tight and Hannibal kisses there next, rocking against Will's ass again, like before. But now, when he slips the head of his cock into Will's hole, he gently rolls his hips forward to keep pushing.

Not even fingers, nothing to prepare him after years, goddamn years, beyond the man's admittedly powerful tongue. Denying Will the opportunity to deny Hannibal with a hiss of *come on already*, Hannibal stretches him painfully wide in slow, steady thrusts, deeper and deeper until Will's sure he's going to tear in half from it. He squeezes white-knuckled against the sheets until his lungs yield as his body has, and his breath leaves him all at once.

He wouldn't have it any other way.

He wouldn't want Hannibal any other way.

Ensuring that his promises come to pass, Hannibal does not relent even when Will's voice cracks and he whimpers the man's name on an aching breath. Will's body is absolutely rigid but for the muscle that Hannibal spreads wide. He wants all of him, every inch, again and again until hurts when he walks tomorrow. He wants to remember, to feel, Hannibal inside of him - thick and heavy and wonderful - for as long as his body will hold that memory, in case -

In case.

There's always the possibility.

But they have this, now, and Will has always been good for a fuck even when that's been all he's wanted for. He rocks his hips back and bows his back, ass pushing higher against the weight of Hannibal atop him and the cock that fills him, still not down to the hilt yet. Shaking, Will laughs helpless at the thought, as he would have when Hannibal breathed disbelief at Will's particular talent for cocksucking.

Hannibal is just getting started.

It occurs to him that perhaps the pain is not welcome, but beyond shivering and twisting and arching back, Will shows no sign of protest. His cheeks redden just across his nose when he turns his head from the pillow to breathe properly, or try to. Will's eyes are barely open, and his mouth is split into a snarling grin - ravenous and beautiful and helpless all at once.

Hannibal moans, shifts gently into another thrust.

He has had people comment before that he is big, some with wonder, some with worry. No one has ever worshipped his cock like Will had for the few moments Hannibal let him. He forces himself not to think of the way Will's lips stretched around him, tries not to think of the way Will shuddered and moaned and rubbed himself when he sucked Hannibal off. He had been utterly beautiful then.

He is utterly beautiful now.

"God, you feel so good," Hannibal whispers, breathless, holding himself up above Will on both arms and trembling with the effort. Slow, slow, inch by inch, until he is buried entirely in the man beneath him. As they pant in tandem, he moves one hand to rest over Will's and slip their fingers together. "So good, Will."

Will sighs, shaking, and tightens their fingers together. Drawing Hannibal's fingers to his mouth, Will kisses softly across their tips, a gentle counterpoint to the steady, firm rhythm that Hannibal starts to drive into him. There is no protest, there is pain but not so much to outweigh the pleasure Will takes from it in taking Hannibal, thick and heavy inside of him. He bends his hips higher, offering more, willing and desperately wanting. Bent forward, he skims his free hand back to between his legs to stroke, pulling a moan that lasts longer even than he pulls his cock.

Hannibal deepens his thrusts. He snaps his hips harder, their skin clapping together. Will's body slackens for him, ass and mouth and breath and voice all opening to allow Hannibal to feel and see and hear Will's yielding. Little curses and laughs scatter across Will's moans, his fingers cinch around the head of his cock to hold himself at bay. It's too good to end now, too unreal to look across his shoulder and see Hannibal mounted across his back, digging his cock into him, seeking clumsy kisses.

"Harder," Will gasps. "More, please - all of you - I can take all of you -"

His body goes rigid when Hannibal fists a hand in Will's hair, pulling his curls straight. He squeezes his cock so hard it hurts, unable even to moan with his neck bent back, and instead making pathetic, helpless little whimpering sounds each time his quickening breath exhales. Panting pleasure and pain both beneath this impossible man, Will whispers, begging.

“Please, I - it’s been so fucking long - Hannibal,” he groans. “Hannibal, I - you’re so good, so deep - please, I really like you.”

Wait.

“I like t-talking with you and eating with you and oh Christ, your cock -”

No, no.

“I want to see you - all the fucking time - I hate coffee shops but -”

Goddammit.

“- I like you.”

Fantastic.

Really fantastic.

He collapses forward as Hannibal releases his hair and this time groans not from Hannibal’s thick cock rubbing up against his prostate, but because Will’s not sure he’s ever felt more pathetic. Finally, he’s in bed with someone. Finally he’s in bed with someone who’s good, *really* good, and who puts up with his shit for the most part. And though Will knows - in that way that he knows things - that there’s parts of Hannibal unknown to him, Hannibal does like him back.

But the time to have that talk is not when you’re being plowed face-first into the other person’s mattress for the first time.

“Fuck,” Will mumbles.

Hannibal slows his rhythm, pulling out almost entirely from Will, watching him curl his hands in the sheets over and over as though defeated. So he thrusts back in, agonizingly slow, until he is lying over Will fully, and the next *fuck* that Hannibal pulls from his lips is a shivering groan.

"Perfect," he laughs warmly. "You are perfect."

It is a moment before Hannibal pulls from Will slow again, sinking deep into him on the thrust once more. He ducks his head between Will’s shoulders and pants against damp skin as he takes his time learning this man from the inside out. Learning which way to turn his hips to pull those hissing snarls from him, those whimpered groans.

Then, without warning, a hand snares in Will’s hair once more and he moans so loudly Hannibal can’t help but speed his thrusts; driving hard, deep, faster, into Will beneath him. Into Will who takes it so beautifully and so well and wants more and -

"You now have no excuse," Hannibal near-growls against him, tugging an earlobe until Will writhes from it, drives himself back harder against Hannibal’s cock. "When I invite you for

dinner. And none at all when I drag you to bed before it," another thrust, "after," harder, "again and again."

He laughs as Will does, curses as he does, and with a sloppy kiss against his cheek whispers harshly, "Let go of your cock, Will."

“No,” Will huffs, squirming to try and avoid Hannibal’s hand seeking out his wrist. “No, I - I’ll - all over your sheets -”

“I know.”

Will resists the gentle tug with a whimper. He doesn’t want to let go because when he does he’s going to blow his load. He’s going to, he can feel it like a fist to the stomach, like a spreading bruise, and when he does, then Hannibal will - maybe into the condom, maybe onto his skin - but he will. He’ll finish too and then they’re both lay there sticky and sweaty and neither will know what to do so Will decides now, right now, that he’ll leave. When he comes and Hannibal comes and they catch their breath, never mind everything he just said, he’ll leave before Hannibal has to figure out how to ask him.

His breath hitches, small and almost pained, and as one hand tightens against Hannibal’s fingers, he releases his length with the other.

Hannibal groans, keeping his pace even as Will near-spasms with pleasure beneath him, even as he spills thick and hot against the bed, against Hannibal’s hand pressed there for balance, even as his voice breaks on little sounds and weak pleas for more - exhausted and undone and utterly perfect in that.

He can feel it building, that crest of a wave of pleasure that usually comes from long pulls and pushes against his own hand in bed at night, imagining this, just this, just *like* this, Will sweaty and panting beneath him, spent and messy and breathless and trembling. It is close, it is so close… Hannibal pulls out despite Will’s weak protest, despite his cursing at being pushed to his back, brows furrowed and lips parted until Hannibal pulls the condom free, and strokes himself, just once.

The heat is unreal, messy drops and smears against Will’s skin as he arches up and grasps with clumsy hands to bring Hannibal closer, until the man goes, and kisses him so deep Will is pressed back into the pillows.

And then it stops.

The frantic motion, the desperate pushing, the need, the *ache*. And still Hannibal kisses him, still he smiles when he pulls back, sets his hands up to frame Will’s face and kisses him, so soft it’s barely there, then deeper, with seeking tongue and gentled teeth.

Will whines protest between their mouths but doesn’t stop kissing Hannibal any more eagerly. Long, slow twists of their tongues together, mouths moving across the sheen of sweat from their upper lips, relishing how it feels to be close to someone like this again. Will skims his fingers through Hannibal’s slick hair and arches up against him, semen smearing sticky between them and his muscles pulling sharp from being so exhausted.

He told himself he'd leave first, before it becomes a burden to ask, before it becomes awkward and Will has to put his clothes back on and find a new place to have lunch. He told himself he'd go but the hands against his face are so wide and warm, the heart against his own is still racing, their skin is soft where it presses damp together and Will doesn't want to go. Even if it is only a matter of time until Hannibal tires of his eccentricities, his much-vaunted grumpiness, his dogs and his books and his everything, Will finds himself entertaining the thought - in the bliss of their afterglow - that maybe he can keep this just for a little while.

They part to breathe and Will turns away, eyes closing when Hannibal draws his nose along his scruffy cheek. More kisses, little things, unbearably fond, and Will can do no more than stroke his hair and welcome the affection.

His heart hurts, not at the inevitability of this becoming another failure in his long list of them, but rather with the fullness that Hannibal has brought to it.

They lie together until their hearts slow, until Hannibal hums and rubs his face against Will's neck in a soft nuzzle, determined to keep touching him while Will is near enough to touch, determined to keep him near enough to, even in the cafe, even when he will go visit Will at his work among the dusty books and unsavory customers.

"I had imagined that you would make a mess of me," Hannibal mumbles, smile pressing wide to Will's throat before Hannibal pushes himself up on his elbows and kisses Will again. "Very, very glad I was right."

He watches Will blush, watches him attempt to frown, though his lips tilt up instead of down and he ends up looking helplessly adorable instead. Hannibal has never been enchanted by anyone so much. He knows he is pressing too close for too long, knows that perhaps Will wants nothing more than to wash and return to bed clean, but he can't help but press closer for it, delighting in the breaths he feels against his face, against his hair, the way Will's fingers stretch and spread soft over his back where they had clawed moments, hours before.

Hannibal knows he will feel those marks beneath his shirt the next day, and he cannot wait to.

With a sigh, he finally pushes up and off of Will, stands and stretches by the side of the bed. He turns only when he hears Will nearly scramble from the bed behind him, gesturing an 'I'm sorry' before reaching for his pants.

"Will?"

The man is frowning, now, in earnest. He considers the mess on his belly at great length, not at all displeased by it being there - in fact, he's certain it will fuel countless morning, midday, and late night moments alone as he touches himself with such ferocity that it almost hurts. But if he's going to go, if Hannibal is going, which he appears to be, then -

"Fuck it," Will sighs to himself, either unaware or uncaring that Hannibal is within earshot. He slips on his undershirt, lips twitching as it settles damp against his stomach, and tries - fails - to not remind himself of mere minutes before.

The affection and the nearness.

The idle consideration of possibility.

The potential for a little longer together, maybe, just a little longer than this.

Abandonment requires expectation, and really, Will should know better by now.

“Thank you for dinner,” he murmurs, pants in hand as he seeks back along the trail of detritus in their wake for his underwear and flinches when he bends to pick them up.

“Will.” His name is almost laughed, now, and Will tenses for an onslaught of berating, a reminder of his failings and that this is just the one night stand he had expected it to be. In truth, more than he expected anyway. “I had hoped breakfast would be just as pleasant, shared in bed.”

Hannibal’s brows are up, expectant and amused, gentle, and he moves to stand before Will again, hands ghosting over his undershirt that is already soaking up the mess on his chest. Hannibal hums and gently grasps the hem of it to peel it up again.

“I will set that to wash, after I’ve washed you and we have wasted most of the hot water in the house.” Eyes narrowed, pleased, he skims his knuckles over Will’s cheek as he frowns, confused. “Will,” he sighs, pressing his lips together even as he smiles through it. “Get your ass in my shower, before I drag it back to bed.”

Will goes when Hannibal snares him by the waist. He struggles, laughing helpless, and with one arm around his waist, Hannibal plucks Will’s clothes from his hand with the other and drops them back to the floor. Dragged undignified and giddy towards the shower, Will squints back over his shoulder, only to find his cheek kissed for it.

“You don’t have to,” Will insists.

“I know.”

A pause, and Will blinks. Of course he immediately narrows his eyes again, but it takes effort to fight down the smile this time, and it crawls wider despite himself.

“But you want to.”

“Very much,” agrees Hannibal.

“Christ, you’re clingy,” Will complains, as he’s allowed to set his feet back to the tile floor, and Hannibal leans past him - still with an arm around his waist - and starts the water.

“So I’ve been told.”

At this, Will genuinely grins. He fidgets around in Hannibal’s embrace and sets his hands against the still-damp curls on his chest, stroking them between his fingers. The kiss they share is gentle, exploratory and sweet, and this time, it’s Will who hums.

“Good. Don’t stop.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> “I could tell you how hard I had to bite back the sound I nearly made this morning while you were asleep, when I dragged myself out of bed. I could tell you how every step today has been a reminder of how goddamn deep you were in me - how full you made me,” he says, consonants clicking sharp as a single brow lifts higher. “I could tell you how I laid in your library this morning, and ran my fingers between my legs to feel how much you widened me.”
>
> Only when Hannibal is holding his breath does Will take a placid sip of his coffee.
>
> “I could tell you a great many things, Hannibal Lecter.”

Chapter Notes

> Proofread by our remarkable beta Noodle!

They shower.

They touch.

They kiss near constantly, as if they might drown without sharing breath between them.

They drag themselves back to bed, Will flinching as he clambers in, and when they sleep, it is in a tangle of limbs with Hannibal half-atop the man like a heavy blanket.

And when Hannibal wakes, Will is gone.

The scent of him remains, the particularities of his sweat, the distant hint of dogs near overpowered by soap. His clothes are not there. His glasses no longer rest on the nightstand. There is only the ghost of his scent and the memory of warmth within the sheets.

Silence pervades the house with an empty hum.

Hannibal sighs.

He supposes that beyond tying the man down, he could not have kept Will in his bed if he did not want to be in it. Hannibal presses his face to the bed again, for just a moment, to breathe Will in there and remember, and then he pushes himself to get up.

It is frightfully early, and though he doesn't have to open the shop today, he can't seem to bring himself to go back to bed. A pair of sleep pants are pulled on around slim hips and Hannibal makes his way downstairs to the kitchen. The coffee maker is set to heat, as he considers the dirty dishes that should be at the table and are not. They are, instead, piled cleaned and dried by the sink.

He can't quite suppress a smile, so Hannibal doesn't bother, just shakes his head and reaches for a pan to begin making breakfast for himself.

Hannibal appreciates politeness. He would, of course, appreciate more if Will had stayed, but there is some sensation of appreciation that lingers in Will having tended the dishes before he left. There is a distinct lack of displeasure in the act. It is thoughtful. Friendly.

It is still not the same as having woken up with Will beside him.

Hannibal tips his eggs to his plate and rinses clean the pan, slicking cast iron with a smear of olive oil after before setting aside. He takes up a mug to pour himself coffee, and then, as if summoned by some magical means, he hears footsteps padding bare across the floor.

Will's hair is tousled, slept on damp and yet uncombed. His bare legs are pale beneath the boxers that hang threadbare and soft against his skin, and above them, his shirt from the day before, plaid flannel, unbuttoned. He squints through his glasses and rubs a finger against his eye, casting a baleful glance towards the intricate coffee-maker.

"I was reading," he mutters. "You said that I could."

Hannibal blinks, and reaches for another mug.

Will casts a vague gesture towards the machine with his hand. "I couldn't figure out how to make that fucking thing work. Would've ended up breaking it and it probably costs more than my goddamn house." A pause, lip chewed for a moment, before he adds, sour to the point of sounding almost challenging, "I don't sleep."

Hannibal just raises his eyes to him, smile warm, genuine, pushing color to his cheeks for the sheer pleasure of seeing Will here, in his home, still. Barely dressed and disheveled and grumpy and so beautiful Hannibal could sigh for it. So he does.

"I hope you found something to enjoy," Hannibal says, accent stronger in the morning as he works himself to wakefulness. He considers the coffee for a moment, feeling remiss in giving it so plainly to his guest, but decides he will impress with breakfast instead. He resists the urge to kiss Will when he steps closer to take the mug, but only just.

"And I have it on good authority that you do sleep," Hannibal tells him, bringing his own mug to his lips to take a sip of the rich, bitter nectar that sustains him most days. "You also tend to snuffle when you do. And nuzzle closer for warmth."

Will blinks, searching quickly across Hannibal's face, but what he finds there settles him. He cradles the coffee as if it were gold and takes a slow sip, eyes closing to savor it. Sucking a

few warm dark drops from his bottom lip, he tilts his head up a little - inviting, testing - and a smile tugs wider when Hannibal leans to kiss him.

“Maybe, sometimes,” he allows as they part. He blushes across the bridge of his nose and wrinkles it, murmuring into his mug. “I used your toothpaste. Not the brush. I used my finger but - it worked. I think.”

He edges past Hannibal, deliberately brushing their shoulders together, and drops onto a stool beside the center island. Bare toes curling against the rungs beneath, he glances towards Hannibal’s plate. “I can’t stay all day. I mean, not that you asked. I wasn’t inviting myself. I have to feed the dogs.”

He sighs with a helpless note of frustration. Truly, he tells himself, he is terrible at this.

Hannibal just watches him, entirely fond, and comes to rest facing Will, his hip cocked against the counter, within arm's reach. He says nothing for a while, contented to let Will absorb his calm posture and warm smile, content to wait for the coffee to hit his bloodstream and for Will to move his feet to press his toes to Hannibal's shins instead of the cool rung of the stool.

"I start at the cafe at eleven," Hannibal tells him, setting his cup to the island behind him before folding his arms across his chest, fingers setting comfortably against the curve of his elbows. "You are welcome to stay for breakfast, and -"

Hannibal’s smile pulls wide a moment before he bites his lip gently to temper it. "I am inviting," he adds, reassuring, amused, and - Will notes - a little hopeful.

Will looks away from Hannibal, trying to fight a smile he can’t entirely restrain. Nearly shy from the attention, his blush darkens, and even the long sip of coffee he takes to try and mask it does little to conceal his sudden delight. Will curls his toes against Hannibal’s shins, stretching and pushing them, inching higher to his knees, his own bent.

Will thinks of his dogs, the laundry that needs to be done, the new books that require examination and precise descriptions to be written. He thinks of the emails that must be sent, the calls that have to be returned. He thinks of kissing Hannibal, all day, laid across the couch or the bed or hell, the floor, who cares so long as he can feel the man’s lips against his own again.

His hands, tangling in his hair.

His cock.

Moving his mug to his lap instead - like that’ll help somehow - Will squints, but without maliciousness. A sleepy playfulness instead winds around his drowsy low voice as he mutters, “I will consider the invitation. Thoroughly, and at great length, with careful attention paid to previous engagements.”

Will parts his lips with his tongue, and grins, crooked, into his cup as he takes a sip, swallowing with a pleased little hum. “Does it make me sound shameless if I tell you how

sore I am just sitting here?"

Hannibal hums his pleasure at the statement and tilts his head, taking up his cup again to cradle, though it's nearly empty. It is almost visceral, certainly physical, the pride he takes in that, remembering how Will had squirmed beneath him, how he had to manhandle him to bed and hold him down, tell him off for moving…

He is perfect.

Hannibal knows the only reason he holds his mug now is so he does not hold Will instead, so he does not reach out to draw his fingers through his hair and tilt his head back and press coffee-sticky kisses to his throat.

And he would.

"You are beautiful in your shamelessness," Hannibal tells him, fond, sets his legs just a little wider apart so that Will's - pressing to them - move with them, his boxers wonderfully close fitting.

"I could be worse," Will offers.

"I imagine so," Hannibal allows. "For as lovely as you are, it is much easier to become less than more."

Will snorts, laughing, and tries to close his legs again. He tries to hide the twitching of his cock and the widening of his smile, but Hannibal holds him exposed and bared. Will's chest grows tighter for it, and he forces another sigh past his lips, raising his chin proudly.

"I could tell you how hard I had to bite back the sound I nearly made this morning while you were asleep, when I dragged myself out of bed. I could tell you how every step today has been a reminder of how goddamn deep you were in me - how full you made me," he says, consonants clicking sharp as a single brow lifts higher. "I could tell you how I laid in your library this morning, and ran my fingers between my legs to feel how much you widened me."

Only when Hannibal is holding his breath does Will take a placid sip of his coffee.

"I could tell you a great many things, Hannibal Lecter."

"Do," Hannibal replies, and does not regret how breathless he suddenly sounds, how strained his voice is. He should make breakfast for them both, double what he has made already and share it with Will. He should make more coffee, add something to it to make Will's brows rise, to make him smile.

Instead he wants nothing more than to get on his knees for the man and kiss his stomach, mark the outline of his cock with his tongue, beneath the thin stretching fabric. He sets his mug aside and drops his hands down to gently stroke against Will's ankles, slightly cooler than his coffee-warmed hands.

“Tell me of the books you perused in the library as you touched,” he murmurs. “Tell me of the plans that will keep you, today, before I bring you coffee in the cafe.” Hannibal smiles, tilts his head again and allows his eyes to narrow in his pleasure. “Tell me if I am shameless in wanting to know when next I can see you spread wide in my bed.”

Will thinks a moment too late to restrain the sound Hannibal tugs from him with his words, a desperate relief, needy and soft, echoing the constant disbelief that Hannibal still wants him here. Wants him here again. Wants him here again soon. He presses his tongue past his lips and sighs, setting his mug aside to rest a hand instead against the back of the stool where he sits, and restraining a grimace of lingering wonderful muscle strain, Will lets Hannibal bring his feet higher, until his toes push firm against thick-haired thighs.

“I read your copy of Spare’s ‘The Book of Pleasure’, 1913,” he notes, both brows raised now beneath his messy hair. “Purely chance that I found it, but your collection of esoterica is remarkable, not only for its age but for the rarity beyond - it is not always those first impressions that are worth most. The folio with limp-cloth boards, no bumps or ripples despite the cheapness of production - you know there’s only 300 of them with his original half-tone illustra-”

He draws a breath sharp enough to cut his words short, shivering into a moan when Hannibal jerks Will’s legs around his waist and steps closer, closing any space between them. Will turns into the hand that strokes through his hair, eyes slipping shut and throat clicking on a hard swallow.

“Today - today I have to drive back, I’ve to drive back to Wolf Trap and - and do chores, and - and follow up about a few books that need descriptions and - you know - and study for their, their wear and rarity for buyers - I -”

Hannibal’s fingers tighten, ever so slightly, and Will bends back with the soft pull, moaning as beautifully as the blush that spills like spring across his cheeks.

“Tonight,” he whispers. “Please, again, tonight or - just - I’ll - the cafe, just after -”

“Tonight,” Hannibal agrees, bending to kiss Will again, tasting the coffee from his lips, the mint from the toothpaste Will had used, the taste of just him beneath. Silken tongue and too-large teeth, the feeling of stubble against his fingers when Hannibal cups Will’s cheek to hold him close.

He is shameless in this. They both are. Both convinced that this is something that will not last for them, that this is something fleeting and well worth the fun but could in no way be *more*, surely it couldn’t be *more*.

Hannibal’s hands slide down to slip over smooth thighs, now, hitching them higher, and wrapping his arms around Will quickly when the other begins to overbalance on the stool and slip backwards. He holds him secure, laughs against Will’s lips when he pulls back and accepts the nip against his lower lip for his trouble.

“Breakfast?” Hannibal asks him.

“You,” Will breathes instead, shaking his head and laughing low as his cheek is kissed, as he turns further away and Hannibal pursues him still. Against the soft beard that covers his jaw, against his bare neck lower still, beneath the shirt that only clings to him and withstands not-at-all the kiss that Hannibal sinks against his collarbone.

“Before we have to go,” Will murmurs, setting a hand to Hannibal’s cheek in turn and bringing their mouths near to touching again. He steals a kiss, firm and soft all at once, another press of teeth into the delicate skin of Hannibal’s perfect mouth. “Please - I need it - you - I need you.”

He slings his arms around Hannibal’s neck again when the man presses against him, and tightens his legs around Hannibal’s narrow waist. He’s lifted from his seat and goes - how could he resist the strength and possessiveness that holds him weightless? - when Hannibal takes Will into his arms.

He smothers the man with kisses, fingernails curling fierce enough to draw red lines down his chest, through thick hair and against hard muscle. Will does not feel anything at all like himself - a grumpy, lonely middle-aged man who surrounds himself with books and dogs to amend for the lack of *more* that now presents itself in possibility. He feels young and virile. He feels desired.

He curses sharply and buries his face into Hannibal’s shoulder with a desperate laugh as Hannibal carries him away, coffee and breakfast forgotten.

Hannibal smiles wide and lifts his eyes to the ceiling for a moment as he makes his way upstairs again, enjoying very much the weight of WIll’s body against his own, genuinely heavy, pleasantly so. It is early yet, still before seven, and they have hours to enjoy together, and Hannibal plans to take advantage of them all.

He does not give Will much chance to move when he tosses him to the bed and crawls over him immediately after, kissing him deeply and pushing him to the bed as he rubs their cocks together, just thin fabric separating skin from skin. Hannibal moans and feels Will echo the sound back to him, fingers seeking and gripping again, tugging at his hair and drawing nails down his back.

In a quick motion, Hannibal peels Will’s shirt from him and drops it to the floor, head down to suck a nipple between his lips. His thumb works to torment the other much the same, until Will frees his legs from where Hannibal has pinned them and wraps them up against his sides.

Will squirms upward, away, as if to fight the exquisite pleasure that Hannibal pulls through him with every firm grip and soft brush of his mouth. He makes it so far as the headboard, and hooking his hands over it, tugs himself up to half-sitting, mouth slackening on a moan as he takes in through hooded eyes the sight of Hannibal against him. Nevermind his apparent and unfathomable desire for Will, nevermind his talent with food and words alike - if none of those things were in play, Will is certain he’d still consider Hannibal the most beautiful man he’s ever seen.

Broad shoulders and a strong back, flexing with restrained predatory power as he pins Will down again. Sharp teeth and flushed lips, cheekbones and a jawn hewn from marble, and dark eyes - tinted red as if they were a bottomless bordeaux in a low-lit room. Will loosens one hand only to sweep it through Hannibal's ashen blonde hair - streaked through with shots of grey - and then he tightens his fingers, gripping hard Hannibal's hair and the headboard alike.

He turns his wrist to force Hannibal's gaze to him, and watches him with rapt fascination, his voice low.

"I have never felt my body change so much as after you had me," Will whispers with unmistakable fondness. "My ass still spread even this morning, my jaw still aching from sucking your cock. Fucking brute, are you always so rough?"

Hannibal's laugh is low, a vibration in his throat before he arches closer, rubs harder between Will's legs.

"I can be rougher," he promises, and it's enough to pull a laugh, a curse from Will. Hannibal had found he adored just as much pinning Will and fucking him as he did the cuddling in the shower, the soft kisses and gentle brushes of fingers against skin. The game between them is an energy neither can control or comprehend, so new and novel and perfect.

Hannibal slips lower down Will's body and nuzzles his cock. Catching Will's thighs when he attempts to squeeze them together, Hannibal draws his tongue long over the raised curve of him beneath the fabric. He teases that way long enough for Will to swear again, for him to squirm and curl his toes and flex them wide again. Only then does he let go of Will enough to slip his boxers from him to discard them as well, only then does he allow Will to wrap his legs over his shoulders and yank him close.

Only then does he duck his head and suck Will into his mouth, thick swallows to take him deep. He pulls off with a lewd pop before doing it again. Ravenous for him, almost savage in how he sucks, how he would grin were he able, when Will's fingers twist his hair enough to hurt.

Of course Hannibal is good at this, too. Why wouldn't he be? It stands to reason that a mouth so skilled at tasting, that purrs heat across his accent, that curves in delicate and ghostly smiles would be exceptional at this, too. And he is - oh, he is.

Will curves up from the bed to plunge his cock deeper across Hannibal's tongue, thrusting into his mouth and watching, eyes nearly closed, the way Hannibal's lips curve around him. With stuttered breaths and hitched moans, Will bucks against the pressure, Hannibal sucking firm as his tongue works hungry undulations against the underside of Will's cock. Will tightens his legs around Hannibal's shoulders, digging heels into his back, and pants breathless, whimpering each time another obscene sucking sound crackles between them.

And when Hannibal sets his hands to Will's hips and shoves him back down to the bed, Will nearly comes undone. Trembling, he pulls Hannibal's hair too hard, he pushes up to drive his cock faster, deeper only to find himself held in place by a man stronger than himself. Without

needing to tell him that this is what he wants, without needing to ask Hannibal to be ungentle with him, he knows.

“Fuck,” Will hisses, as Hannibal draws back just to the head of his cock to wriggle his tongue against his salty slit. “You - let me - goddammit, let me suck you too -”

Hannibal hums, as though in warning, but his eyes are narrowed in delight when they look up at Will. Beautiful in his demands, in his helplessness, in the way he twists Hannibal's hair between his fingers over and over. Hannibal moans from the sensation and pulls off, allowing Will his freedom to move, as he watches with hooded eyes and a pleased smirk.

"Greedy," Hannibal chastens him, going when Will yanks him close to kiss, huffing laughter when he is flipped on his back and pinned in turn.

His own hands come up to frame Will’s hips and he bucks up, a teasing warning, a grin to follow it.

“Very,” Will agrees, frowning at the man beneath him. Disapproval is Will’s natural state of existence, so feigning it is easy enough, especially when doing so yields such a ferocious blush from Hannibal. Will sits against his stomach, fingers splayed through his chest hair, and pensively rubs his cock against Hannibal’s twitching belly. Back and forth, each upward stroke shining with a viscous clear bead of precome that slowly drips, and leaves a trail glistening in its wake.

“I am insatiable,” Will murmurs. “The psychological byproduct of having things that I want only very briefly, before they slip through my fingers. I have them long enough to begin to know them, to see their depths without time to experience the whole. It leaves me empty.”

He sets his lower lip between his teeth and lets his eyes slip closed, rutting firm and shameless against Hannibal’s stomach for another stroke, another, until his held breath moans free. Will turns dark eyes to Hannibal.

“I want you to fill me,” he whispers. “For as long as I have you.”

Pressing his fingers against Hannibal’s chest, he pulls the thick curls there and pushes himself down the length of Hannibal’s body. Clumsy kisses and sharp teeth catch nipples and ribs and belly, but before he reaches Hannibal’s cock, swollen stiff, Will turns a leg over and sits facing away. Just as languid, like a cat stretching in the sun, he spreads his body long and offers his cock again to Hannibal, as he bows low to inhale the musky heat from Hannibal’s cock. It lifts, twitching harder, as if to independently seek his lips, and Will turns a look back across his shoulder.

“I didn’t ask you to stop.”

In retribution, Hannibal squeezes hard against Will’s thigh, enough to leave an impression of his fingers there, pale before they fade to deep pink. But he says nothing on the matter of the demanding man above him, merely spreads his thighs wider and kisses hot against them, teasing.

He reaches Will’s cock just as Will nuzzles Hannibal’s own and moans, kissing sloppy around the base, behind Will’s balls, up higher to tongue his hole again, holding him still when Will bucks and pulls from him to swear.

"I didn't tell you to stop," Hannibal tells him, grinning before returning to the tickling licking, just the tip of his tongue. He rubs a hand to the small of Will’s back, leaning up to press it higher, and push with gentle insistence to bend Will low. Forceful, in a tender way. Demanding, and very fond.

Will is rather taken with him.

And he is very taken with his cock.

Will has known cocks before. He prefers them. Something about the commanding manner of them, stiff and insistent, seeking only one particular end. He wouldn’t consider himself a size queen, mostly because he fucking hates the term, but given preference and a selection - which he’s never really had - he likes his cocks the same way he likes his men. Substantial. Strong. Capable of altering not only mind but body. Ferocious, to a degree, but only when used with skill.

And given the ample nights Will has had alone to imagine a bevvy of cocks, he doesn’t think he’s ever actually had one that so precisely matches his ideal. Will kisses slow against the shaft, from the base where dense hair tickles his nose and catches in his scruff, higher up taut skin that twitches soft and responsive beneath the damp heat of his mouth. He follows the throbbing vein with the tip of his tongue, learning its pathway and grinning when Hannibal grunts a mild displeasure at being so teased.

Will spreads his tongue wide across the skin that keeps shielded Hannibal’s cock-head. Velvety and delicate, wrinkled at the tip until Hannibal somehow stiffens more and the skin slips back to reveal the glistening slit beneath. Will’s breath across it - an enraptured sigh - shivers Hannibal and he rocks his hips upward, seeking Will’s mouth but finding only his lips closing in a reverent kiss against the tip.

He grins, eyes closed blissfully, and grasps Hannibal’s length with a hand to calm his undulations. Tilting his head from side to side, Will rubs the salt-slick tip against his lips, back and forth, teasing with his tongue as it passes, chasing, kissing, sucking just a little, as if to deny himself the pleasure of being filled again, and knowing how satisfying it will be when he finally swallows him whole.

Hannibal resolves himself to teasing Will just as thoroughly, licking slow, sucking soft before breaching him with just the tip of his tongue. There is something so intimate about eating out another man, bringing him entirely to helpless delight with strokes and sucks and twitches of tongue. In the relationships Hannibal has had, he has always enjoyed using his mouth to give pleasure. Every single person tastes distinctive, their own cocktail of hormones and sweat and personal smell. Hannibal cannot get enough of it.

So he takes his time slowly working up to devouring Will properly, already half-blinded by desire from what the man is doing with his lips, with his throat when he deliberately draws Hannibal deep enough to breach it.

Hannibal brings a hand up to stroke over Will's balls, silky skin slipping between seeking fingers, he laughs, enough to tickle the skin, when Will pulls off of him to swear.

"Keep sucking," Hannibal moans. "Fuck."

Will makes a strangled sound around Hannibal's cock, unwilling to let loose that fullness from between his lips, heavy on his tongue, thick against the back of his throat.

Will bows his head deeper, his mouth so full his breath rattles from his nose, worshipping Hannibal's length and girth, his heat and scent, the way his cock curves just a little upwards, how hot the head of it has become now that Will has rolled back his foreskin with his lips. Perfect. Utterly perfect. And Will could spend the entire day scraping the back of his throat raw sucking Hannibal's cock, until his jaw locked and his lips grew numb, and not want for anything in the fucking world.

"Like that," Hannibal growls, rough hands spreading Will's ass wider. He curses again, and this time his words pull more from Will than the helpless whimper that escapes him anyway. This time, they pull his hips arching forward, and he drips, copious and clear and hot, against the hollow of Hannibal's throat where the tip of Will's cock points stiff. He blushes, he hopes unseen, but it hardly matters when his pale skin has been pinkened so brightly by the quickened pulse tripping and speeding beneath his skin.

More and more Will gives, and - to his moaning delight - more and more Will gets for his trouble. He has had his fair share of selfish lovers, determined to get off and go, he has had several determined to blow his mind, and though some had come close, Hannibal is the only one who can lay claim to leaving Will breathless, filled, satisfied, from just feeding him his cock alone.

And god, he has done much more than that already, so much fucking more.

Will moans and Hannibal moans with him, arching up in a languid stretch as Will's legs slip wider apart on the sheets, toes curling against Hannibal's arms, thighs taut and trembling when Hannibal curls a hand around one to pull Will back harder, spread him wider.

When Will finally lets Hannibal's cock slip from his mouth, he rests it against his scrubby cheek, smearing spit and kissing, still kissing, sloppy slow touches of his lips down Hannibal's length. He is starved for this. Ravenous. And entirely fucking content to spend possibly the rest of his life stuffing his mouth with Hannibal's cock.

But when he slows, only to stop himself from blacking out with breathlessness, so does Hannibal. Will squints over his shoulder, bows his back and brings his hips higher, but still there's only one kiss touched to his ass for every one Will gives Hannibal. He frowns. He wiggles. He tries to make himself seem tempting, but Hannibal is iron-willed, and finally Will laughs, helpless.

"I -"

“You stopped,” Hannibal reminds him, and Will twists his jaw from side-to-side to restore feeling to it. Numb already - he’s out of practice - but it does seem a loss to be so close to something so delicious and resist. Will curls his tongue around the head and licks the tip into his mouth, suckling slow and easy.

“I want,” Will murmurs again, between licks, sucks, kisses, relentless and reverent. “I mean, I like -” He nuzzles and sighs open-mouthed against Hannibal’s shaft again, kissing there, too. “When you tell me. W-What to do, when you swear - Christ, do I have to fucking do everything myself?”

Hannibal thrusts up, suddenly, a pleased grin on his face when Will turns back to look, indignant.

"Suck," is all Hannibal tells him, drawing his fingers over Will’s hole, again and again, only pushing in when Will takes him into his mouth again. It is a teasing stretch, just a hint of the fingering he will get should he choose to be grudgingly cooperative.

Hannibal groans and lies back, head back and eyes closed and smile wide as he turns his face to kiss Will’s thigh and suck a dark mark against it when Will takes Hannibal deep again.

There is something so entirely human about Will’s desire for this, his genuine enjoyment of it, taking Hannibal down his throat, between his lips, making a mess of his face with precome and spit. Hannibal can feel the dripped heat of fluid against his throat and smiles wider, biting the soft thigh enough to make Will jerk lightly.

"You're going to lick me clean after this," he warns him, amused, pushing his fingers deeper when Will seeks to voice a protest. "You're hungry enough for it."

Will doesn’t deny it. The words curl a long, aching moan from him, poured against Hannibal’s cock as Will sucks with renewed fervor and genuine relish. He is hungry for it. He has been without for so long and forever without one like this, like Hannibal. Another finger joins the first in his ass and Will would laugh if Hannibal’s cock weren’t leaking down the back of his throat.

He’ll be hoarse later from this.

He shudders and bucks his hips forward, finding that the firm hand against his thigh holds him in place. He rocks back, and Hannibal obliges in spreading his fingers to widen Will. His body yields, still so freshly fucked from the night before, but that pleasure is wholly secondary to the one already filling him just from the chance to devour the cock that Hannibal feeds to him. Though his toes curl when Hannibal bends his fingers, his cock drips thick against his throat and chest, Will is hardly distracted by it.

How could he be, when he can relax his throat and nearly bring his lips to the base of Hannibal’s cock, close enough that pubic hair tickles his nose?

How could he be anywhere but entirely focused on the spit that drips messy and delightful between them, slicking down Hannibal’s balls, heavy and full?

How could Will pay attention to anything but how Hannibal fills every inch of his mouth and there is still more of him to take?

The fingering is lazy, slow, Hannibal delighted by Will's eagerness, by his skill and the pleasure he gets from doing this alone. Hannibal's own lips make a slow pilgrimage across Will's hot thighs, up to his groin and just teasing the base of his cock before moving on again.

"Come on, Will," he coaxes, breathless himself, barely able to hold back the way continues to consume him. "Let yourself go so I can paint your lips after, watch them drip - please-"

Will pulls his mouth free of Hannibal's cock with a wet pop and groans against his groin, lips parted against hot hair, curled heavy with spit. "Fuck," Will moans, a trembling hand still curled around the man's length. He nuzzles against it, his breath pushed from him each time Hannibal's fingers fuck deeper, every time he curls them to rub hard against his prostate.

But for as skillful as Hannibal's fingers are - doctor, cook, incredible goddamn lover - it is the thought of what Hannibal wants to do to him that shortens the jerking of Will's hips. Erratic, taut, he bucks untouched but for the fingers in his ass and suddenly snaps still with a long and wavering whine.

Thick globs spatter hot across Hannibal's chest, soaking into his hair, roping white across his skin and pooling pearlescent at the hollow of his throat. Will could faint for it, but the persistent throb of Hannibal's erection against his cheek is reason enough to try and steady himself, despite the mess he's just painted across the man's body.

"Fuck." It's a breath, strained and needy, and Hannibal kisses hot against Will's messy thighs, sucking the skin to clean it, nuzzling it where he can't. He is extraordinary. He is exceptional. Will is entirely fucking beautiful.

"Your mouth," Hannibal urges, enough that Will nearly sobs at the words, kisses up the slicked length of Hannibal's cock to take him between his lips again. Will sucks, trembling, and groans, high and loud, when Hannibal's arm lays heavy over his back to hold him down.

And then he comes.

Thick and hot over Will's tongue and down his throat where Will relishes in the struggle to swallow. And so it spills, down past his lips and over his chin, until Hannibal is spent and Will is panting, come dripping from his lips as Hannibal had promised, eyes blown from his pleasure. Body shaking and in another dimension entirely, it seems - Will feels like he's left his body behind.

"Let me see you," Hannibal mumbles, a smile pulling his words to a heavy accent and warmth that Will has grown to relish. "Messy Will."

No amount of whiskey has ever made Will feel so drunk as he does right now. He sucks, sloppy wet sounds sending shivers down both their spines, he sucks every salty, musky drop from Hannibal that he can until the man starts to soften. Hannibal sits up enough to fist Will's hair and tug him back, and Will goes with a laugh, reeling dizzy as he's pulled back in a sprawl. He slides from off Hannibal and to his back, their legs and arms a tangle.

His chin, his mouth are smeared wet with clear spit and viscous white semen, his eyelids are heavy over darkened eyes. Carnal intoxication floods a rough shiver through him that bends his back from the bed with a groan. His cheeks are ruddy, his mouth scarlet and swollen.

He is filthy, every bit as hungry for this as Hannibal declared him to be, reveling in the delicious pleasure he pulled from the man. But even for how dirty he knows himself to be, Will feels beautiful, and the thought makes him laugh, weak and unsteady.

Hannibal watches him, entirely enthralled, entirely enamored. Hours, yet, for them to enjoy here before they have to go their separate ways for the day. Hannibal feels dizzy with this, already wanting to see Will again, though he is right here, in his arms now, sloppy and messy and laughing like a delighted child.

Hannibal leans close and smears a thumb through the mess, sucking it clean before kissing Will square on the mouth, uncaring for the mess.

"Do you have any idea," he whispers, kissing Will again, tasting himself, tasting the heat of Will beneath it. "Any idea what you do to me?"

"This," Will snorts, and Hannibal kisses him deeper to shut him up.

"Not just," Hannibal assures him. "And, I hope, not just today."

“Tonight, too,” Will allows, grudging in tone but suppressing a smile. He firms his lips and narrows his eyes, but it does nothing more than soften Hannibal’s expression in return. “And -”

“And,” agrees Hannibal. He grins, victorious, and nuzzles Will’s cheek, his throat, kissing everywhere with no mind at all for the filth they’re both sticky with. There is an innocence to it, despite the appearance of depravity, both taking pleasure in the other’s joy, and the results of it now spread between them.

Will hums, and touches his fingertips through the semen drying on Hannibal’s throat. Further down, tugging at stiffened curls of hair, Will bucks his hips slowly at the sensation of it. Turning to their sides, he works steady, sucking kisses across Hannibal’s neck, tasting himself on his collarbone, spreading his tongue once through his chest hair and sighing, groaning, with the heady rush of it.

“Fuck,” Will sighs, bringing a hand up to rest on Hannibal’s cheek. “Really, I don’t think you could keep me away from it,” he mutters, rueful, but then a little gentler, adds, “or you. I mean, not just that part of you. But that too, Christ. I just meant - shit.”

"Good," is all Hannibal says, turning his face into the hand against him. He brings his own to cover it, his other around and under Will to press to his back, slippery, still, with sweat.

He parts his lips and reconsiders. Tries again and swallows the words away. At length, though he murmurs, "I like you, Will. Very much. And would work, if necessary, for more days like this one."

Will lets himself be pulled closer. He would not have inched himself nearer and imposed on Hannibal's space. He would not have suggested dinner or a date, or instigated the great *and* that has followed it. He would not, without prompting, have returned to the coffee shop. For a moment he wonders what else he's closed himself off to in his effort to try and restrain the self-destructive openness that has always made him know more than others wanted him to know.

Only for a moment, though, because - as if he can hear Will's worry - Hannibal touches their mouths together not with lust but with affection.

It doesn't matter who else Will let in or hasn't let in, when he knows Hannibal's tenderness to be entirely genuine.

"We'll work on it," Will says, the most he can allow just yet. "A day at a time, we can try."

For now, it's enough.

His smile widens a little, before he conjures up instead a very somber look, indeed and says, "Starting tonight."

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

> “Just a lot of old junk here,” says Will, stretching back from the counter and lifting his chin. “Nothing of real value, just imagined. Dusty. Undesirable. Really not worth the trouble.”
>
> “I disagree entirely,” answers Hannibal, smile widening. “I think there is immense worth for those who are determined to find it.”

Chapter Notes

> Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

Will hardly had the complaint formed in his throat before Hannibal responded. In his hands, the sweater he peeled off Will not long before, and on his lips an apology for not having clean trousers in his size.

Will regarded him at length enough to seem wary, before shuffling off to the bathroom to dress.

Not that it matters that he didn’t bring a change of clothes. Anyone who comes to see him at the shop wouldn’t notice if Will wore the same damn thing every day for a year. Hell, he could probably sit there bare-ass naked and not get more than a passing look before being interrogated about one edition or another.

He dressed anyway, slipping into the clean shorts that Hannibal tucked neatly into the folded sweater, alongside an undershirt, and finally his own pants. Alone in the bathroom, strangely self-conscious about dressing himself in front of Hannibal, Will was glad for the privacy. It allowed him a moment to bring the soft scarlet sweater to his face and breathe in the scent of Hannibal still clinging to it.

He does the same again, standing behind the counter of his shop. Careful fingers, wary of stretching the finely woven cashmere, bring the knit to his nose. There Will holds it, sighing against the memory of Hannibal’s heart hammering beneath his lips. They parted at the door of Hannibal’s extraordinary house, Will avoiding a kiss and blushing furiously as he turned wary eyes to the rest of the street. Hannibal had settled warm lips against his cheek instead.

The drive to Baltimore was long enough for Will to work himself into a panic and back down again, fingernails digging crescents into the cheap fake-leather steering wheel. Nothing special, really - the usual litany of *he's definitely not real*, *he definitely wants something*, *really? you?* and so forth. But Will could tell, something in the dark depths of his eyes or the shadows where fine lines fanned beside his eyes - something in the way Hannibal touched him, not during sex, but before and after.

The same way Will himself touches books of astounding rarity and value.

The way someone touches something of worth.

The way someone touches something not only for the status it might yield, but in reverence for the thing itself.

That, he can't deny. Will knows in the same way he always knows things about his partners. When they're lying to themselves, lying to him, hopelessly smitten or rapidly falling out of the spell of whatever meager charm Will has managed to cast over them. And so his thoughts go there instead. Not a question of *is this just a fuck* but *how long will that last?* He's had more than enough relationships that bloomed to ripeness and then soured to rot, and ostensibly, none of them ever meant it to be that way any more than Will desired. It just happened. Boredom, something lacking, something excessive - Will's general demeanor, he assumes - no matter what it is, he's not enough. He's never been. And, he cursed himself aloud in the car, both of them are going to end up miserable for this.

Isn't that the way it always goes?

But for now he rests content, at some sort of uneasy peace, with Hannibal's warm masculinity filling his nose and the sweater soft enough against his cheeks to remind him of nuzzling into the man's chest. Will gives up the stool where he normally sits on first look, snorting at the idea of putting his ass on anything at all today after the wonderfully rough treatment the night before. Instead he stands, elbow on the counter, computer in front of him, back swayed into a comfortable lean as he browses his email and the sites of other distributors, auction houses and message boards.

His lips purse and as if on cue, his phone vibrates beside him.

"Little early, isn't it, Katz?" Will snorts. "Hell does it matter if I'm late, you're not even in the same time zone. How did you - ah, right. I forgot it shows me when I log on. Bastard site," Will sighs, pressing his fingers to the bridge of his nose.

"The *Scaramouche*," he mutters, reading his screen. "First imprint, usual octavo blah blah but the *dust jacket*. If the pictures and the description aren't just bullshit, it's as close to perfect as you can get. Fuck the book, you can toss the book. It's the goddamn dust jacket that makes them worth something."

Will pauses, and grins despite himself. "I know, must have made them out of tissue paper or something. No, no buyer yet, but it's underpriced so I figured - what, you want it? I don't want a bidding war, Christ, nobody wants that. But at least give me some other book to distract myself with if I'm just gonna let you have it -"

The little bell over the front door jangles and Will's eyes flick up, not fast enough to see who had come in, but enough to see a broad back make its way towards the back corner. History books, two glass cabinets, not enough for Will to end his call just yet. At worst, the cases are alarmed if tampered with, at best, whoever it is would buy something or leave.

Will wonders how he even does business with an attitude like this, and snorts into the phone.

"No, not you, it's - well, I've already placed a bid. Of course I have. No, anonymous again. I don't need another fucking shitstorm over this - you don't either, stop playing the saint," Will laughs. He straightens and folds his free arm across his middle, resting his fingers in the crook of his elbow as he holds the phone.

He can hear the visitor moving around in his shop, still, quiet steps, paced well and almost lazy. Will grits his teeth thinking of how it's probably some illiterate bastard wanting to impress with his money and choice volumes on the shelves. He has seen so many, works with more still. He can feel the disappointment already as he turns from his computer with a sigh and pushes his glasses up again.

"Six, I would think," he says. "It's worth at least twice that but no one will bid it. Keep it low, if you're going in, last thing I need is you running up the price just for spite," Will laughs, and then sighing, spreads a hand across his eyes, unseating his glasses. "You know Budge has a copy right? Of course he fucking does. He's probably got a fucking dozen of them, mint. Wouldn't let me near them, of course, but tugs me along by my dick like he's going to. Nah, same shit. Any closer on your side? No, I guess he can't tug you along by that but – alright, alright. Go bid on it, you don't need me to hold your hand."

He hangs up shaking his head and fingering over the screen to check for new messages.

"Excuse me," the customer, guest, *client* says. Will's shoulders tense, eyes still on his phone for the moment. "I don't have an appointment."

His shoulders stay drawn but he grins, sudden and bright and contrary to his contrarian nature. Will quickly tampers it to a passive frown, his default expression, and taps aimless on his screen to appear busy, still despite how the man's voice vibrates through him.

"Appointment only," Will snorts. "Number's on the door or you can take a card."

"I was hoping you might help me despite your policies," comes the response, nearing Will with quiet footsteps.

"Policy's in place for a reason, I don't keep most of my stock here. What are you looking for?"

Familiar fingers set to the edge of the counter and Will's gaze twitches upward, but no higher than. The memory of those fingers snaring into his hair, stroking against the small of his back, pushing him down to *suck*...

"Something rare and very special," Hannibal responds, and at this, finally, Will lifts his eyes. Hannibal meets his gaze with a smile and Will squints.

“Just a lot of old junk here,” says Will, stretching back from the counter and lifting his chin. “Nothing of real value, just imagined. Dusty. Undesirable. Really not worth the trouble.”

“I disagree entirely,” answers Hannibal, smile widening. “I think there is immense worth for those who are determined to find it.”

He sets to the counter a bag and a substantial cup of coffee, and Will can’t help but laugh, brows lifting. “Paper cups?”

“You’ve changed me unimaginably,” murmurs Hannibal, and with a grin, Will reaches to snare the cup and breathe in the aroma of it. “And you’ve quite a way about you in your salesmanship. Very convincing.”

“Don’t you have a job?” Will chides him. “A shop to run, *clients* to tend to? Isn’t it still your rush hour?”

“Considering we’ve already closed, no, I’m afraid it’s very slow right now.”

Will blinks. He glances back to his computer, the phone, and for a moment appears entirely lost. It isn’t the first time it’s happened. Not even the first time this week, and most days it’s a blessing when time slips by so quickly unnoticed, Will’s work conducted at distance rather than directly in the shop. Really, he should sell the shop - dump the overstock or store it in Wolf Trap, reinvest the money from shunting the place off onto someone else -

“Goddamn,” Will sighs. Cradling the cup in his hands, he brings it to his lips. “How was your day then, I think, is probably what I should be asking."

Hannibal watches him, smile warm, as Will tastes the coffee, just a hint of hazelnut today, otherwise black as night.

"Long," he admits, as Will licks the taste from his top lip and just holds the cup again. "Very busy, and wanting." Will raises his eyes and Hannibal just smiles wider, eyes wrinkling in the corners, lips curved. "Our most notorious customer was absent."

"Notorious?"

"Infamous," Hannibal amends, resting his hip against the counter and crossing his arms gently over his chest.

"Frightful."

"Very," Hannibal laughs. He wonders why it is so easy for him to smile with this man, why Will makes it so easy. Hannibal feels his ribs expand with a deep breath in, lungs pressing in against his heart to try and settle it. It's embarrassing, surely, for a grown man to be so fond of another, but Hannibal finds he cannot help it.

"Something that will not spoil your appetite for dinner," he says, gesturing to the bag.

“Pretty sure you already did that this morning,” Will snorts, amusement curling his words. “Spoiled it so much that having that again is all I’ve been able to think about today.”

He blushes at his own insinuations, clearing his throat to try and ease the tightness that Hannibal causes in it. Will's throat still hurts, a little raw from their endeavors, but every tickle that might otherwise cause irritation has only sufficed as wonderful distraction throughout the day.

Will takes the bag and peeks inside, as Hannibal regards the space that Will calls his own. A narrow store that spans far back, lined with shelves and those shelves lined with books in turn. There are hand-written placards indicating the general theme of the books on each shelf, but equally there are shelves merely stacked with books both sideways and upright, every space filled to the brim. Glass cases keep prying hands away from valuable editions that don't yet have a home, these far in the back away from the sunlight that struggles through the storefront windows. Will's counter is untidy, but Hannibal imagines he has his own sort of organization to it - whereas anyone else would be adrift in navigating it, he's certain Will knows every book in the shop and where it can be found. Among those stacks on his desk, a small space carved for only himself and his computer, now pushed aside so he can see what Hannibal has brought him.

Inside, are elaborately twisted cheese straws, ranging from light yellow to deep, dark orange. Some plaited together, others twisted against themselves, all smelling entirely divine. Will snorts, not expecting something so simple to be in Hannibal's cafe and yet entirely unsurprised that something so simple most likely does not.

He takes one to try as Hannibal turns to look at him again.

"Whiskey," Hannibal tells him, as Will makes an embarrassing sound and devours the thing. "I'd heard of the technique before, cooking with alcohol beyond the norm, and decided to try my hand at it."

"Fucking miracle worker," Will says, savoring another bite. He shifts his weight to his heels, rather than slumped forward across the desk, and watches Hannibal in fleeting glimpses, never lingering too long on any one part of him. His hands in his pockets. The ease in his shoulders. The breadth of his chest. The smile that spans slowly as he feels Will watching him.

"I would offer to cook for you," he notes after a few moments, "but to hedge my bets I should offer to pay for dinner instead. Less burned pans that way. Do you want to sit?"

Hannibal tilts his head, curious, and then takes in the stool beside Will, unused. The man gives him a rueful look, and Hannibal has to fight down a wider grin.

"I'm fine, thank you."

"I can't come over now," Will says, abruptly. "I have to go home to take care of the dogs first."

"Of course." Hannibal appears entirely unsurprised, far from put off, still that warm smile, that genuine pleasure at being in Will's presence - for some still-unknown reason. "And I would enjoy it if you made a meal for us," Hannibal says. "A cook learns by experience and through it, and every meal is just that."

"Is that why you all go to rival restaurants for a meal?"

"That's the reason, yes."

"I thought it was innate masochism."

"Occasionally it is," Hannibal grins. "But only occasionally."

“Could also be a superiority complex,” Will points out, motioning with a twist of smoky cheese. “Savoring the failures of others in comparison to one’s self. Analyzing all the ways in which you’d have done it better, delighting in the fact that they didn’t. I imagine that makes for a satisfying meal, too.”

“Satisfying in some ways,” Hannibal agrees, “but not nearly as tasteful.”

Will hums his assent to this around another sip of coffee. He sighs a long and extended pleasure at the taste, sucking it from his lips and bringing a finger to the corner of his mouth. He watches Hannibal watch the motion, just a glance, but caught, and Will’s eyes narrow in delight. For just a moment longer than needed, Will lets his fingertip linger there to draw up a bead of coffee.

“I can promise that whatever I make you will be entirely satisfying in its tastelessness. If you want me to reassure you that you’re vastly more talented at this than I am, I could try to make something,” Will allows, cautious. “I haven’t made jambalaya in a long time. Fucking house is a wreck compared to yours, though. And an hour away.”

"The best places I have been to for dinner have claimed to be talentless and not worth my time," Hannibal tells him, amused, still, by Will’s determination for him to see his flaws as worth more than he is. He wonders what will win, his own patience or Will’s persistence.

"And I have been told that my house is frighteningly more like a show home than a place one lives. It would be a comfortable change to see a home that feels lived in." He regards Will with a smirk before turning away to regard his store once more. Elegant chaos, just like the man himself.

"I think I may have the perfect wine to accompany a jambalaya."

“I like your house,” Will shrugs, as genuine in this as he is in everything else he says. “It feels like you. Beautifully maintained. Skillfully arranged with a careful eye towards aesthetics and quality both. Wealthy, on the surface, and not only with money, but with more worthy things - hard-earned things. And substantial.”

Hannibal lifts a brow, and Will snorts.

“Besides that,” he says, rueful. “I mean that I’ve only seen a fraction. I imagine there’s very few people, if any, who have seen every corner and detail inside it. Certain rooms are for show, others have a more personal touch beyond that, and there are probably rooms where no one ever goes but you. Or have bothered to go. Or have been allowed to go.”

It’s a lot of words said, spilling out quickly, and Will quiets himself by pursing his lips together, and sucking them between his teeth. He does this. He always does this. He can’t help but do this and more often than not, it’s an alienating thing - too personal, too invasive. Will only exhales after a long moment has passed, and he crumples up the empty bag to toss to the trash, clicking his computer closed to gather his things.

“I’ll text you the address. Give me a head-start, I’ve got to buy - you know. Food. And try to tidy up,” he adds, already dubious as to the success he’ll have.

Hannibal just inclines his head, graceful and lovely, lifts his eyes before he lifts his chin to watch Will. Then he smiles.

"Shall I bring more than the wine?" He asks, pleased to see Will respond almost physically to the implication. "Dessert, perhaps?"

“I thought I was doing this so you wouldn’t have to,” Will reminds him. “You cook all damn day, Christ. Give it a rest.”

Hannibal lifts his chin, smile broadening, and Will drops his laptop into his bag, shunting in a few books beside it. He flips it closed and shoulders it, dropping his phone into his pocket and snaring his coffee. Circling around the desk, he stops near Hannibal but doesn’t yet venture closer, considering his question.

“Bring the wine if you’d like,” he allows. “Besides that -”

Hannibal raises a brow.

“Change of clothes. Condoms - I don’t have any. Toothbrush, so you don’t have to use your finger like I did.”

And with that, Will gestures to the door to allow Hannibal to pass.

Hannibal ducks his head, and with a smile steps closer to kiss the side of Will’s face. He lets his lips linger before moving to the door as directed, waiting for Will to lock up before going to his car.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

> “Wouldn’t be a very remarkable restaurant,” Will considers. “Very one note. This and whiskey on the rocks is as good as it gets. You’d do fine, though. I could manage the front. Drive everyone away before they even take a table so that we can just fool around in the back.”
>
> This time, Hannibal’s grin breaks into a laugh, and Will’s smile widens in turn. He tastes the jambalaya - as consistent and filling as he had hoped it would be, despite nearly tipping over an entire tube of pepper into it.
>
> “If this is as good as it gets,” Hannibal says, “then I’m very lucky.”

Chapter Notes

> Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

The message comes when Hannibal is in the cellar, the sound echoing in the cool space. It states, as promised, an address. A message immediately after reminds Hannibal not to bring dessert. The one following corrects a typo on dessert and Hannibal finds he cannot stop smiling.

He selects the wine and flicks off the light before ascending the stairs to the kitchen again.

The bag he packs is not excessive, large enough for a change of clothes and the wine, condoms - a new box, as he had promised himself - and two books for Will’s consideration, one wrapped in wax paper and held secure in a bag of its own.

His drive is pleasant, quiet, few cars on the road, and far too much time to think. He allows it, enjoys it, considers the comfort of having this frequently, of settling into a relationship with Will. Their habits are similar, their affection for the other clear... he smiles, wonders at Will’s ability to make him feel like he is trying too hard and not enough at all once, and how quickly and genuinely he wipes the concerns away.

The house is easy to find in that it is the only house to look for. Squat and well-kept, it rests in a clearing, forest around and behind it, the whisper of running water nearby. The first thing he hears is barking, scratching at the door, whining, and Will’s voice fondly telling the

animals to *heel, back, just... don't jump* as Hannibal closes his car door and makes his way up the porch steps.

When Will emerges, slinging open the screen door, it's with wide eyes and an outpouring of dogs. They surround Hannibal, pushing wet noses against him with interest - his bag, his hands, his groin, his shoes for the ones too small to reach much higher. To their credit, they don't jump, but after a few moments bound out into the grasses, leaping and barking.

"Shit," Will sighs, apropos of nothing. "Hi. Your car's really quiet."

"I could honk, next time."

"Don't you dare, then they'll start barking," Will complains.

It's not without fondness, though, nor is the look that carries over his pack at play. Better cared for than his books, than Will himself, really, they are happy, healthy creatures, and some too-tight part of Will seems to loosen in their presence. A little more at ease, in his home and with his dogs, he lets the porch door slip shut and steps closer to Hannibal than he normally might, emboldened.

He leans up, tilting his head, but waits for Hannibal to kiss him first, and when he does, Will makes a happy, small sound between their mouths.

"Hi," he says again, almost shy. "You found it okay? Sorry for all the texts - fucking autocorrect."

Hannibal strokes over Will's hair, just a little damp from his shower, warm against his scalp. He's in a soft flannel shirt, slouching jeans and bare feet, and Hannibal cannot stop looking at him.

"I had no trouble," he assures him, leaning in to kiss Will again, turning to look at the dogs swarming his car and the grounds beyond it. "They are very well behaved," he notes.

Will responds as a parent would when their child is praised, smile wide and eyes bright and another fond look to his pack of mismatched animals. Hannibal feels his smile grow just seeing the pride radiate from the man. This is his home, his life, and he has allowed Hannibal into it to peel it apart and look beneath the fixing.

"It is very peaceful, out this far, I can understand how working from home may be tempting."

"It often gets the better of me and I do," Will says, gesturing for Hannibal to follow him into the house, holding the door for him and several dogs who follow them both in. Hannibal takes his shoes off at the door and sets his bag aside so he can crouch to offer the dogs his hands to sniff.

"I tease with what I have not provided, I'm afraid," he tells them softly. "I smell of a great many things."

Will crooks a brow at this. He stops his return to the kitchen just in the doorway, leaning against the frame. "You didn't cook, did you?"

“No,” Hannibal says with a slight smile. “Earlier in the day - I’m sure they can still seek it out. Bread and coffee and whiskey and cheese.”

The dogs realize quickly they are not to be given treats just yet from the man, and so turn their interests instead to seeking out pets just as eagerly. Will watches, arms folding, as Hannibal gives them each his attention, patient and kind, and a warm tug fills the spaces between Will’s ribs, full to nearly bursting. He lets himself imagine this, just this, Hannibal joining him here and knowing all the dogs in turn, comfortable with them and with Will and all the habits that accompany both. He imagines spending some nights at Hannibal’s, splitting the travel between them.

It could work.

More to the point, Will suddenly wants it to work.

“That’s Maggie,” Will tells him, as Hannibal lays a hand to the head of the big brown mutt. “The little one trying to eat your laces is Buster. He’s a menace. Ferocious. The shaggy one is Winston. You’ve caught him on a good day - he had a bath earlier this week and hasn’t found enough mud to roll around in yet.”

Hannibal greets every dog as it is named. Zoe and Cameo, Fresco and Spike. All the dogs petted and smiled at, allowed near, despite the hair that would inevitably seep into Hannibal’s clothes and never leave them again. Hannibal stands only when the dogs have been given due attention, and moves towards Will with a smile.

"Am I banished from your company and the kitchen until dinner?" he asks, finds a snort as his reply.

"You helping would defeat the purpose."

"May I watch, then?" Hannibal smiles. "Pour you some wine?"

Will shrugs and nods, all at once, a fluid gesture that spreads his palms out wide as he turns back into the kitchen. “You’re not going to ask about the bed?”

Hannibal blinks, and glances back across his shoulder to the living room, where Will’s bed resides. He can see additional rooms towards the back of the house, stairs that might indicate more there, but truly, it doesn’t matter half as much as joining Will as he works.

“Should I?”

“Everyone does,” says Will. He returns to the pot boiling on the stove, immense and heavy, and takes up his wooden spoon again to continue stirring. “Or they ask questions around it, ‘oh are you painting the bedroom’, shit like that.”

“Perhaps I’m not ‘everyone’,” Hannibal suggests, removing the wine from his bag. “Do you want to tell me?”

“Not particularly.”

"Will you let me share it with you?" Will smiles, and he has his answer. "Then why should the reason at all matter?"

Shaking his head with a laugh, Will doesn't say anything, in an attempt to prevent saying something stupid. Surely the patience, the understanding, it can't last, not this long, not with so little to get back for it. Will knows how difficult it is. He accepts the glass of wine and the touch against his lower back from a warm palm.

"For the sake of curiosity, then," Will ventures.

"You are an endless curiosity to me," Hannibal laughs, turning to lean against the counter, out of Will's way, but close enough to see him, to talk comfortably.

He had meant to goad the man, to prompt him into behavior that Will has come to expect, so that Will could gird himself defensively before it happened. It still hasn't happened. Hannibal cares about the bed - the countless eccentricities that Will knows he has - only insofar as Will cares about it. And altogether, the effect is calming. Will breathes. He stirs.

He opens himself a little more.

"I used to be in the police force. Detective work, homicide, a long time ago," he murmurs. "In New Orleans. I got hurt once, and it made me paranoid. You've seen the scar."

"Your shoulder."

Will hums. "Now I'm just used to it being there, the bed. But it's always a fucking issue for other people - not like I live in the middle of the city or something and people are going to wander by the window. Idiots." He sips his wine, he stirs more, he tastes this time, and offers some to Hannibal in turn. A hesitation holds his breath, but this too releases, and Will nods towards Hannibal's wine glass. "What happened to you?"

Hannibal allows himself to taste the food properly, to savor every spice and smell, how it works with the tangy wine. He considers Will's words, commits them to memory, finds himself associating some of his reactions, his defenses with the story. Hannibal nods.

"It took me a long time to get used to having more than one floor to my home again," Hannibal admits, a truth for a truth, though perhaps not all of it. "I lost my family at a young age. I had to make do for many years. Medical school was a good distraction, and an honor to my parents." Will turns to look at him and Hannibal smiles warmly. "I was surprised by the inheritance. The house, now, resembles my family home."

The younger man ducks his head to check the simmering stew, accepting and considering the words that Hannibal has shared with him with as much care as Hannibal did his own. His imagination cascades like cold water down his spine, eliciting a shiver as a thousand morbid possibilities for what became of the other Lecters spills through him. All terrible, all heart-breaking, whatever the cause, and made worse by knowing the gentleness of the man at his side and how long he's carried this all alone.

Will thinks back to earlier in the day, when he described rooms that Hannibal does not share with guests, and knows that he stands now in one of them. Cast in shadow still, its details unclear, but a sacred ground opened to Will alone.

He sets the spoon against the edge of the pot, and steps aside to lean against Hannibal, heavy. Hannibal encircles his shoulders with a strong arm, and softly, seeking nothing more than the comfort of nearness, Will touches a kiss to Hannibal's cheek.

"I'm sure they'd be proud of you," he says with absolute certainty. "How could they not?" Reaching slowly, Will removes the glass from Hannibal's hand and sets it aside, and joins their fingers together. He traces his lips across Hannibal's fingertips, and a mischievous light catches in his narrowed eyes. "I was asking about the scar," he teases.

Hannibal casts his eyes to the small scar on his hand and breathes out a nervous laugh, a first that Will has heard from him. For once not endlessly confident, for once as worried as Will about a response and reaction.

"A removal of unnecessities," Hannibal says, without elaboration. A smile catches his eyes and he brings their joined hands to his lips to kiss Will's fingers instead. "I have made an effort to compensate for the loss of peculiarities since."

Will makes a small, pleased sound, cheeks warming. He's curious, certainly, but doesn't pry any more than Hannibal did about the bed, or hell, about Will's scar, for that matter. It's enough, to give so much to each other already, it's enough to know that they can converse at all rather than simply holing up within themselves. For a moment, though, Will imagines not a mole or wart, but Hannibal as polydactylic, and even that thought is charming enough that he snorts a little laugh.

He wouldn't care even then.

"I'm sure you still have plenty," Will assures him. "Christ, we're like *The Odd Couple*."

He ducks the kiss that Hannibal tries to plant on him, grinning when it presses to his cheek instead. Disentangling himself, Will returns to stirring, and squinting, and trying to settle his galloping heart to a steadier pace in time with the movement of the spoon. His cheeks are still flushed, though, when he finally looks to Hannibal and says, "You're malingering. Dishes are in the cabinet if you want to do something."

"Of course," Hannibal smiles, planting another kiss to Will's hair as he passes him. The dogs join them in the kitchen, Will ordering them out but finding few care to listen when an exciting new visitor could possibly reach for treats and be lenient with them.

Hannibal, instead, just gets the plates. Deep wide bowls that seem more fancy than Will's house would suggest, now. He wonders if Will's home in New Orleans was a bit like Hannibal's is now. The thought is oddly amusing. Hannibal wonders if someday he will fall victim to flannel and denim and dogs.

He supposes there are worse ways to go.

"Shall I set the table or will we eat at the counter?"

“Hell,” Will swears, blinking wide over his shoulder. “Is it that bad?”

Hannibal cants his head in response, a dish in each hand and a questioning arch to his brow.

“At the table,” sighs Will. “Like I’m going to make you stand and eat -”

Pressing his tongue between his lips, Hannibal steadies the smile that begs to appear and responds only, “I meant that you have stools, there, to sit.”

Will snorts, keeping his back to Hannibal as he heaves the pot from the stove and moves it to a cool burner. “Guess you just learned something about me then.”

He holds a hand out for the bowls, and one at a time, fills them with the still bubbling jambalaya. It smells of bay leaves and chili peppers, smoked sausage and shrimp, rice and vegetables all muddled together. An easy thing, in theory, to throw a bunch of crap in a pot and let it go, but Will knows better. Everything has to be added at the right time, so that the rice doesn’t get soggy, so that the sausage casing still snaps when it’s bitten. It takes precision and practice, and - if Will feels at all like patting himself on the back - he’s actually not bad at it.

Of course, he doesn’t belabor Hannibal with things that he must already know, instead simply handing him back the bowls once they’re full, and setting a lid to the pot. Will refills both their glasses as Hannibal sorts out utensils, and Will lingers by the table, awkwardly, only moving to sit once Hannibal himself pulls out a chair.

He realizes *after* he sits that Hannibal was pulling out the chair for him, and sighs, muttering an apology into his glass.

Nothing from Hannibal but a smile, always a smile, as he settles and takes up a piece of bread to soak and place delicately in his mouth. A hum, then, of utter pleasure. A sound Will remembers from their joining, from having his lips around Hannibal’s cock, deep and warm and filled with uncontrollable pleasure.

It makes Will smile more than he perhaps should, and he takes another sip.

"If I ran a restaurant I would be on my knees begging you to work with me," Hannibal tells him.

"And as it stands?"

"I will get on my knees and beg just the same, if it pleases you," Hannibal grins. "Though, perhaps, for different things."

“Wouldn’t be a very remarkable restaurant,” Will considers. “Very one note. This and whiskey on the rocks is as good as it gets. You’d do fine, though. I could manage the front. Drive everyone away before they even take a table so that we can just fool around in the back.”

This time, Hannibal’s grin breaks into a laugh, and Will’s smile widens in turn. He tastes the jambalaya - as consistent and filling as he had hoped it would be, despite nearly tipping over an entire tube of pepper into it.

“If this is as good as it gets,” Hannibal says, “then I’m very lucky.”

Will snorts, as he always does when Hannibal pays him such bald-faced compliments. He motions with his spoon, brow creased.

“Other way around, I think. I should be thanking every god I can name that any of this has somehow charmed you,” Will says. “Are you always so indiscriminate with your compliments?”

“In that,” Hannibal muses, “you are the one who is lucky. I give credit where credit is due.”

“For blowjobs and jambalaya? It’s never that easy,” Will mutters, shaking his head. His eyes have not lost their sparkle though, nor the narrowed pleasure that Hannibal brings to them.

"For company and humor," Hannibal counters, takes another delicious mouthful of his dinner before laughing again. "And for jambalaya and blowjobs. You have an incredible mouth, Will, for conversation, argument, taste, and..." Hannibal grins, and allows himself to enjoy the ease with which Will snorts, lets himself relax.

Hannibal does not know what he did to earn the affection of this man, but he is grateful beyond words.

Beneath the table, Hannibal's feet push up against Will’s, cross, and without hesitation Will sets his own in the vee made for them, ankles to ankles, and takes up his glass to take another sip of wine.

"You have an awful habit of occasionally abandoning your sentences without ending them, Doctor Lecter, did you know that?"

"Do I really?" A smile, eyes narrowed and lips parting to take a bite of bread.

"Is it that you can’t say what you mean or you don’t want to?" Will leans back in his seat. "I do wonder."

"Perhaps it is a fear that I lack the eloquence to keep up a gripping discourse with such an educated man as yourself," Hannibal offers as an excuse, delighting at the game.

“Distraction through flattery,” Will notes, licking his lower lip briefly between his teeth. “I imagine that works on most people, especially from someone so talented and good-looking.”

“Am I?”

“Fishing doesn’t suit you, Doctor.” It’s said with a pleasant narrowing of eyes, though, and no rancor despite the teasing title. “And yes, you are. And you know you are, whether or not there’s anyone around to say it. But you like when there is. You’ve nothing but pride in yourself and your achievements. In what it’s taken to reach the point you’re at now.”

“Now who’s distracting through flattery?” Hannibal wonders, folding his hands to lean a little nearer, eyes hooding just an increment when Will strokes bare toes against his pant leg. Will grins, taking another long sip of wine, and sighing pleased at the taste.

“There’s a difference between flattery and fact. Flattery is false, intended to fill one’s head with smoke and mirrors, to distort the other’s self-perception and turn their attention inward rather than towards the truth at hand.”

“Factually, you think I’m good-looking,” Hannibal reiterates, brow lifting. Will tries to fight down a smile and mostly fails, his cheeks darkening as he looks towards his wine. “Then you should know that factually, I do consider you educated. More than, in truth. I think you are fascinating.”

“Like taking a deep dive into shallow water.”

Hannibal clicks his tongue, amused, and bends just enough under the table to pull Will’s feet into his lap, holding them there when Will squirms in surprise at being so handled. Again.

"Like enjoying a longed-for swim after a hot day, perhaps." He regards Will before taking up his wine to sip, other hand stroking just beneath Will’s pant leg, caressing the warm skin, before turning his fingers just so to tickle, enough for Will to jerk and twitch and laugh.

"Factually, I think you are good-looking," Hannibal adds, amused.

Will’s cheeks color, a sudden flush heat outside of his control. But the tight, small smile that appears, or the way he shakes his head, once, is all too reserved. Still, blue eyes alight bright from behind his lenses. He searches Hannibal’s features, skimming across his gaze but taking in the whole of his expression, as if seeking something with only seconds to spare before it will be gone.

His mistrust runs deep, too furrowed into the pathways of his thinking for him to avoid slipping into again. But whatever he looks for in Hannibal’s features, he doesn’t find, and slowly, his expression eases again.

“I believe you,” Will says with surprise. He curls his toes against Hannibal’s thumb when it rubs beneath them, squeezing and releasing, kneading again and again. “And factually, I’m - glad? Relieved, I suppose. Anxious.”

At this, Hannibal tilts his head, and Will sighs.

“Hopeful,” he clarifies, sliding his glasses back up his nose. “That I can continue to meet your expectations. That as you’re swimming, the mud at the bottom of it all doesn’t begin to bog you down. That the insects don’t bite. Factually,” he says, jaw working once, tense, before allowing a smile, “I enjoy spending time with you. It’s been a long time since I’ve even thought of saying that to - to anyone. I find you interesting.”

Hannibal strokes against Will’s skin again, a slow soothe, over and over.

"I'm glad," he says. Before them, dinner is finished, wine nearly so, and Will looks warm, comfortable, if a little nervous before him. The dogs have settled in the main room, by the fireplace and on the worn sofas. It feels like a home, lived-in and special.

Hannibal feels his heart beat faster, his smile spread wider.

Gently, he lets Will's feet go.

"Shall I do the dishes?"

Will's toes push a firm line down the inside of Hannibal's thigh as they slip lower, curling up against his calf, and finally come to rest at his ankle. With great effort, Will suppresses a groan or an apology or both. It is perhaps the least sexy way to flirt imaginable, made worse by his clumsiness. He's too old for this shit. He's too long out of practice. He's too -

Will blinks, and takes in the degree to which Hannibal's eyelids have lowered, in counterpoint to the rising darkness in his cheeks.

"No," Will decides. He sucks his bottom lip between his teeth, and grinning, adds, "Do me first."

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“Let me show you something.”

“You're showing me a lot already,” Will snorts, grinning. He lets his eyes drift meaningfully downward, over the age-gentled lines that mask Hannibal's significant strength beneath. His gaze travels down thick, greying chest hair, to his soft stomach, resting there, just there, between his legs. Hannibal opens his bag, and lifts a brow.

“Besides that,” Hannibal responds mildly, almost prim. “Though you are welcome to keep looking.”

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

Will awakens first.

His phone buzzes beside the bed and he snatches it up on reflex before the first vibration ends. Blinking bleary-eyed at the screen, he curses under his breath, and rolls to his back to read his email.

In truth, it's a miracle he slept at all, considering his past problems in allowing partners to spend the night. Usually it's a brusque screw, awkward attempts at cuddling entirely devoid of affection, and a desire to not have someone else's sweat on him that finally pushes them away and saves Will the sleepless wariness of others. But despite some distant misgiving, he hadn't felt the need to make Hannibal leave. He had scarcely considered it at all beyond his synapses firing down well-trod pathways of thought. And thanks to the the combined benefits of his own bed, a filling meal, and a sound fucking from the man still asleep beside him, Will had slept.

Watching Hannibal beside him, expression soft – young, almost – in his rest, Will figures it probably has a great deal more to do the latter than the former.

He tells himself he'll answer just this one email. Just one and maybe he'll check in on the auction that ended overnight. Just one and maybe he'll check the auction and then there might be a response. Just one and the auction and answering the response and then – if he and his client are both awake now anyway – he might as well try to get this all resolved in advance.

Just all of that, and then he'll sleep again.

At least that's what Will tells himself as his gaze sharpens to awareness and his thumbs tap across the screen. He's close. This deal has been a case of bad foreplay and blue-balls for months, going on a fucking year, really. Will trying to impress some financier with a collection to die-for into letting him price and sell it on the man's behalf. The financier being an absolute piece of shit with a particularly cruel streak that involves entertaining Will's offers just enough to give him hope, before blowing him off again.

But maybe now. Maybe now, if Will just does a couple things, and then he'll go back to sleep.

He manages a paragraph, carefully worded and adjusted over and over for the perfect tone between grovelling and demanding – it has always been a give and take with this guy anyway – before a heavy arm sets over his middle and possessively pulls him closer. In brief panic, Will turns to look at him, and finds Hannibal apparently entirely unaware, apparently still blissfully asleep and unaffected by anything.

Certainly not aware of how his grip now holds one of Will's arms down against his side and prevents him from properly typing.

Will considers a moment, changes hands, and starts the next paragraph.

Or it would be more accurate to say he tries to.

Hannibal's cuddling should be annoying, with anyone else Will would have long ago dispelled the notion that such things were okay with him. But Hannibal isn't anyone else. Hannibal is the man who is humming soft and warm just behind his ear, just at that one place where he has learned Will squirms when touched or kissed.

Will shivers at the sensation, tilting his head aside as if to delicately shed the breath that passes across his skin. It follows. He turns his head to the side entirely, arm across himself to hold his phone in front of his face instead. Hannibal's nose presses there, again, just behind his ear, even closer now.

Will wants to tell him to fuck off. Will wants to tell him to go back to sleep. Will just as much wants to yield and throw his phone against the wall and bury his tongue in Hannibal's throat, brushed teeth or not.

But kissing doesn't keep the lights on, though Will absently supposes that it could, in theory anyway. Arm outstretched, his twists his lips together and continues typing, settling a hand over Hannibal's – against his chest now – to stop it rising any higher. It would ruin something – the game, the flirtation, whatever – if he were to ask Hannibal to leave him be for a moment to finish this. It would ruin the illusion that Will isn't going to spend the rest of the morning just so, spitting curses at his glowing screen and making piteous noises of intense spiritual and financial agony into his palms.

And honestly, Will hopes that even in spite of that, Hannibal doesn't stop.

For a while, anyway, the touches ease in their insistence. Hannibal sighs and appears to merely return to sleep, though now pressed closer to Will than he had been previously. There is a strange comfort in that, whether the man had genuinely not woken, or had but read Will well enough to leave him be is irrelevant really. Whatever the case, he remains pressed firmly and warmly to Will, his breath slow and steady and comforting against Will's skin.

He finishes his email.

He manages to get another open before a gentle hand settles to Will's own, and with expert fingers – considering his eyes are still closed – Hannibal locks Will's phone for him.

“At least,” he mumbles, “allow yourself reprieve between your replies.”

There is no accusation in the tone, no mockery or laughter. Merely a suggestion, as Hannibal's demands are always phrased to be, that Will let himself relax, if for a time.

Will licks his lips between his teeth in irritation, but it eases as quickly as it appears, a solitary cloud across a blue sky. Hannibal does not presume to take his phone from him, nor does Will imagine he would do anything more than lay, just as he is, if Will unlocked it and went back to work. He doesn't set the phone down yet – no, that would be giving in too easily – but neither does he immediately click it back to life.

“If I don't answer, someone else will.”

“It seems unlikely at five in the morning,” Hannibal responds, and the drowsy thickness of his voice pulls Will back against him, before he realizes he's moved. “And unlikelier still that an hour's difference either way truly makes one.”

He draws a breath and in doing so, his chest hair tickles against Will's spine, pulling a pleasant shiver through him.

“Been in the book business a long time?” Will snorts, hand moving incrementally towards the nightstand, slow enough that he hopes Hannibal doesn't notice.

Hannibal's smile is felt against Will's shoulder, though he says nothing at all on the matter, resists the urge to speak at all, by licking his lips instead.

“I have haggled,” he offers, to both of their amusement, and nuzzles against Will some more, bringing his arm from his chest to rest against his arm instead, just holding there, gently stroking the skin. He himself hardly wants to get up, and he knows that a long drive awaits him when he does.

And for a moment, one brief and spontaneous moment, Hannibal considers not coming in.

“Is it your white whale?” he asks instead, more coherent now that he has been awoken against his will, but comfortable enough so long as Will doesn't move far from him.

Will's smile is dire, as bleak as his tone. “Of sorts.”

He finally sets down the phone, face down so he doesn't see it alight with promise and desperate hope. Settling back down to the pillow, Will brusquely shoves his body back against Hannibal entirely, no more tickling, just seeking to be held against the man, back to chest, and feel himself surrounded by him.

“You want to tell me,” Hannibal says, questioning and stating all at once.

“Maybe I don't,” comes the immediate, impudent answer. “Maybe I don't want you dead in my bed, bored to expiration by me carrying on about moldy old tomes that no one but moldy old men care about.”

Hannibal hums, and the touch of his lips to Will's shoulder spirals loose the tension from it. “Forgive me, then.”

Will blinks. The utterance is so gentle, so genuine in both sentiment and serenity that Will can hear it echoing moments after it had passed. Will wonders if he'll ever actually be able to pull his head out of his own ass long enough for this to work. He wonders if there's any part of him undamaged by time and loneliness and bitterness enough to uphold such a thing. He wonders if he deserves it.

Will knows he doesn't. He figures Hannibal will know soon enough anyway, if he doesn't already after such a brusque morning greeting as all this.

“Not the book this time, I've given up on the goddamn thing,” Will says. He seeks Hannibal's fingers with his own and brings them to his mouth, sighing warm words across them. “My real Moby, Tobias Budge. Piece of shit financier – not that he made his money himself, he just invested inheritances. The kind of 'businessman' who'd as soon plow under a kindergarten to build glass and metal high-rises for spoiled trust fund babies. And has done so, more than once,” Will adds with a snort. “Whatever. He's got a collection and I want it, and he knows I want it. I asked for first choice in keeping select copies, totalling no more than 5% of the collection. More than fucking fair. And he won't bend on it. Wants to pay me flat. I'd be selling fucking hundreds for him for a pittance on my terms, but I don't want his fucking spare change, I want his *books*, goddammit. He's got some beauties that I – I *want* them.”

Will finally draws a breath, and holds it so long that Hannibal slips his fingers to Will's throat as if to check his pulse. The younger man rolls away from Hannibal with a groan, burying the long agonized sound into his pillow before he mutters, muffled:

“I'm sorry. I'll stop.”

Hannibal would laugh, and truly it is utterly endearing to see Will this way, smitten with histories and the stories within. There is an appreciation, a respect there, that Hannibal knows immediately is not held by the same by the man Will refers to. He knows many of the sort, himself, those who enjoy the prestige of a fine collection but know little about it beyond how much money they spent on acquiring it. It is as worthless to them as it is priceless to Will.

He does not laugh. Instead he shifts around himself and nuzzles warm against Will's side again, not insisting so much as offering, the warmth and comfort of the night they just spent

together, sleeping and resting and sharing space. When Will doesn't pull away, Hannibal presses closer still.

“Negotiations are futile?” he asks, already knowing the answer before Will nudges his face against the pillow in a pitiful nod.

“I think he gets a fucking kick out of watching me turn myself inside out for him,” Will says, turning his head towards Hannibal with a sigh, though he keeps his eyes away from the dark ones that watch him, for now. “Power-hungry and sadistic.”

“Few are not, who come upon money from birth,” Hannibal agrees, but there is a smile on his tone that soothes the tension from Will again. “Would it be worth the investment, perhaps, to meet his demands? Or is it now on principle that you refuse to?”

“Fuck him,” Will says, without reservation. “Fuck him and his ill-gotten gains. I'm not meeting his demands. He wants to pay me a flat rate to inventory, to categorize, to sort and sift and finally fucking sell, I mean, I've got to find buyers and – it's a lot of work. A lot of work. I don't want a flat rate and I don't want his filthy goddamn lucre.”

Will pauses, and sighs.

“The books I'd take. His money? No. Rich prick like that needs to learn that money can't actually buy him everything he wants.”

Hannibal doesn't disagree, humming low and spreading a hand across Will's back when the man rolls plaintively to his stomach. He follows the ridge of his spine from the valley between his shoulders, to the basin just above his backside. Honestly, the complaining doesn't even feel good anymore, as it once might have, and it doesn't give Will the moral victory he knows he's already claimed. All it does is fill the space between him and Hannibal with hot air, and whatever happens, really, Will loses. He loses ethically if he takes the job, he loses in every other way if he doesn't get it.

So really, none of it matters.

Will sighs, long. “Some pillow-talk, right? Christ.”

Hannibal kisses his hair. In truth he can say little without sounding patronizing, without sounding as though he is coddling Will into a choice one way or another. He does not understand the business, it is not his own. Just as, he is sure, Will would make assumptions and give suggestions to him regarding his cafe, without knowing the underlying importance and repercussions of one choice over another.

It hardly matters, really, anything. The man in question is a proud and ignorant one, bored with is own life and contented to get his entertainment belittling another's.

With another hum, Hannibal pushes himself to sit up in bed, moves to crawl over Will and set his feet to the cool wooden floor and make his way to his bag still set by the door. He gives little care for how bare he is, outside the windows the world is still dark, still cold and they are isolated enough that it should hardly matter. The dogs lift their heads curiously as he

moves into their space, and with gentle whispers to them, asking for their patience and silence until their master is ready for his morning, he takes his bag up to return.

Will groans softly and buries himself in the sheets, and now, Hannibal does laugh, moving to straddle Will as he did getting off the bed, but not moving enough to actually get off of him.

“Let me show you something.”

“You're showing me a lot already,” Will snorts, grinning. He lets his eyes drift meaningfully downward, over the age-gentled lines that mask Hannibal's significant strength beneath. His gaze travels down thick, greying chest hair, to his soft stomach, resting there, just there, between his legs. Hannibal opens his bag, and lifts a brow.

“Besides that,” Hannibal responds mildly, almost prim. “Though you are welcome to keep looking.”

“I will. You're certainly heavy enough to keep me distracted.”

Without missing a beat, Hannibal adds more of his weight to Will and grins when the other groans from the feeling, bringing his hands to Hannibal's thighs, now, instead, with a laugh. He has gentled already, has allowed himself to – for the moment – forget the phone on his bedside table.

“Gift, then,” Hannibal amends, as he adjusts his position so Will is not uncomfortable beneath him. “A distraction that would last longer than the moments it would otherwise take you to merely look.”

“You got me a gift?” Will scoffs gently, but his brows furrow, heart already beating quicker with the worry that he hadn't, that he should have, and goddammit, this is why he doesn't do relationships. The cues are foreign to him unless he can read the person entirely – and that, in truth, is worse still.

“I got you several,” Hannibal responds, smiling at Will as he sets the bag aside but holds his hand within it, not yet taking out the promised offering. “Some you are welcome to keep looking at, though I would suggest you distract yourself with this for a moment.” His eyes narrow in a smile, and he waits for Will to roll his eyes in feigned displeasure before pulling from the bag a parcel folded in paper and plastic. He passes it to Will.

Despite the early hour, despite the rude wake-up from Will's least favorite non-customer, despite the lack of coffee in his system, Will manages not to make a snide no-I-was-joking remark of *oh, a book, how did you know*. And as he slips loose the smooth plastic and acetate-free paper, its ends tucked together not with a bit of tape but with a clever fold, Will is glad that for once, he finally managed to bite his tongue.

But the book in his hands nearly makes him bite it off.

He should be wearing gloves, he should have the book on a flat surface. He knows, and he doesn't care. The Moroccan leather shines red, not yet faded to brown. The stamped title shines, gilt, but tells Will what he already knows. From first sight, from texture, from smell

probably, too, of which there is remarkably little and Will knows that if he were to fan the pages there would be a dryness to the scent of it but no moldy sweetness, no brittle desiccation. Pages free of all but the most minimal foxing and letters still as black as if they'd been pressed that morning and -

Moby-Dick. Herman Melville. 1853. First edition. First imprint. Harpers. Limited to a run of approximately two-hundred fifty, the majority of which were destroyed in a warehouse fire.

And.

Will parts his lips with his tongue as he parts the pages with his fingers.

And.

White end-papers.

Will holds his breath as he brings the book closer, checking the corners, the center, where a paste-job aged to that degree would have begun to bubble and warp. Nothing. Perfect. And with his heart beating so hard in his throat Will is surprised he hasn't choked to death, he whispers with reverence:

“You are such an asshole.”

If he had seen Hannibal preen in his cafe, having fed Will a meal he not only enjoyed but complimented him on, it is nothing compared to what the man does now. And still, *still*, there is no malice there, no cruel pride that emanates from men like the one humming Will's phone to life again – he ignores it. Hannibal is smug but he is pleased, he is giving Will a book he is seeking because he knows that Will is seeking it, and he knows *why*.

“Yes,” is all he whispers in return, careful to move off of Will and lie next to him instead, moving his bag to rest on the floor on his side of the bed. He folds his arms beneath his chin and watches Will touch the book with such reverence. He is beautiful. He is radiant, and Hannibal just watches him take in the thing in his hands as though he has never seen anything more precious.

“Something that came to me with my inheritance,” Hannibal explains quietly. “Well-kept and looked after but rarely a book I seek to reread. Such an item should be with an appreciator, not in a library, untouched.”

Will struggles with his words. He struggles with breathing, in fact, and more's probably the better since Will isn't sure that he could ever feel this way again, and so it might as well wrap up here and now. Go out on a high note and all that.

“Christ,” Will whispers, but this curse is a whole different sort of oath than the ones Will normally lets spit free, snarling. He won't tell Hannibal that he actually has no care at all for Melville's works, that he's only read them when required in classes. It doesn't matter, when the object itself – rare and special, a victim of history and bad luck – is already loved enough to make up for the clumsy symbolism and tedious description within. It doesn't matter, when Hannibal, watching in near-tangible pleasure beside him, is the one who gave it to him.

“I feel like I should tell you not to let me have this,” Will whispers. “That you should keep it. You know, isn't it a little soon for all this kind of thing anyway. But I'm reasonably certain – reasonably goddamn certain – that if you tried to take it from me now, I might do you bodily harm.”

Hannibal's smile curls wider, as he rubs his cheek against his arms. “I'll choose to hear that as a 'thank you'.”

“Thank you,” Will whispers, nearly laughing from the desperate strain in his voice. “You – I mean – I can't take it without asking. You know how much it's worth, right?”

Shaking his head, Hannibal answers only, “A fraction of the pleasure that you having it has already brought me.”

“You make me feel decadent,” Will sighs, fond, entirely fond. “You know I won't sell it. You knew that when you decided to do this, you – you want me to keep it, and I will, but hell, Hannibal. I feel like I should read the entire thing through just like this. Like your family did or – or whoever had it before, if anyone, you know? Just lay here and read it as if it were an ordinary thing.”

When he brings his knees up to set the book gently against them, he drags a hand across the corner of his eye as if to rub the sleep away.

Hannibal just watches him, still, says nothing, does not goad for more words, does not encourage or discourage what Will is about to do either way. He knew, yes, that the book would never find a buyer, not when given this way, and in truth he would hardly have cared had Will chosen to sell it, in the end. But he knows, too, how magical this is for Will to hold this thing, to read it, as he said, as though it were a normal thing.

He curls himself a little more and looks at Will as he opens the book and just touches it, just takes it in. His cheeks are flushed, eyes bright and wide as much as Hannibal can tell. Sweet, gentle, sensitive man. He wonders how many people he has allowed to see him this way, how many people he has allowed to be near when he is so engrossed in his work and his pleasure both. He wonders, for a brief painful moment, if anyone had ever truly cared about Will's interest and his work, or if they were the ones who had systematically taught him – falsely – that he was not of interest beyond his body and the pleasure it could give.

“I ask two things in payment,” Hannibal adds suddenly, watching Will stiffen almost immediately, and allowing a brief breath of pause before continuing. “That you do with it what you want to do with it, be it to add to your personal collection or sell it to another,” he smiles, shifting his leg to slip against Will's behind his ankles, hooking gently around to pull him a little to the side. “And I would like to shamelessly invite myself to your home for dinner again. When it is convenient for you to have me.”

Will's laugh is genuine, sudden, enough that he's embarrassed by how freely it comes and he tucks a hand across his mouth. Shaking his head, he eases into a sigh and nods. Little at first, and then more eagerly, watching Hannibal with eyes narrowed not in mistrust but in near-childish delight. He doesn't know how long it's been since anyone has made him feel this way.

He isn't entirely certain that anyone ever has. Not like this, and not without wanting in return much more than what Hannibal asks.

“Tonight,” Will offers. “Tomorrow night. Any night, probably, until one of us gets tired of the other and – you'll want this back then – “

“Will.”

Hannibal need not say more than that for Will's cheeks to bloom in a rush of red again, and he quiets his endless worry to allow this feeling to linger rather than smothering it out.

“Any night, honestly. Many of them, I hope,” he says instead.

Will bites his lip, and reminds himself that this book is his, his to read or keep or do anything with. And yet it feels dangerously decadent when he sets bare fingers to the title page, and skims his fingers down the ink. He caresses it with the same tenderness with which he touches Hannibal, stroking the page and following its still-crisp corners with fingertips only. It's enough to make the man shiver.

“I think I'd like to have you now, too,” he whispers.

A hum in answer, as though the question need genuinely be considered, and Hannibal shifts his leg a little more, straightening Will's on the bed again as his slips his leg out from under Will's feet. In the same motion, he straddles up over Will's thighs. Hannibal doesn't otherwise move for the moment, head still resting on his folded arms, smile still almost sleepy in its pleasure as he watches Will from the bed. Another movement of his leg brings Will closer against him, and Hannibal rests his palm against Will's cheek before turning him closer to kiss.

It's lazy, almost sloppy in the morning, and utterly perfect. There is a strange affection that he knows they both can feel, a strange familiarity and wonder and *want* that is far more than the primal need to fuck and press close and prove something.

They don't need to prove anything.

Hannibal feels Will close the book and carefully set it back into its bed of plastic and paper and set the lot on the bedside table on top of his phone, that goes entirely ignored now. Only then does Hannibal move to push his body up over Will's to lie atop him as their kiss deepens and Hannibal's hands frame Will's face.

Whereas Will's body is a pliant and yielding thing, limber arms wrapping around Hannibal's neck, strong thighs enclosing his hips between, Will's heart races. Vertigo nearly takes him, but he finds his grounding against Hannibal's lips, sinking into his certainty again and again and letting it steady him. The abuses of his ego – or lack thereof – aside, Will knows he's not done enough to merit this, not this degree of fondness, not the impossible gift, not this man, silver-haired and gentle-eyed and talented, brilliant, utterly beautiful. And for once, it makes Will want to work that much harder, rather than to simply give up.

He pushes their hips together, finding Hannibal an immoveable and comforting weight above him. Hips curling as if to buck the man free, Will rubs again and again, rutting in slow and aimless pleasure, not to hurry up and get it over with, but to savor. No, Will hasn't done enough for this, but he can. He will.

And even still, he starts to turn towards his stomach, unseating Hannibal just enough to slow their kisses.

Hannibal kisses the side of his face, his cheek, under his jaw, soft nuzzling things, until one hand gently catches Will's face and turns him back again.

“Don't,” he asks, soft, fond, but he does not hold Will in a way that would be restraining, not now. Should Will continue his turning Hannibal would let him. “Let me look at you.”

They have not yet faced each other like this. Always Will on his knees, bent and bowed, his face turned away, his eyes closed, his mind lost not in the intimacy of their acts but only in the physical satisfaction of it. Wary that his face may somehow change, and show some unwanted memory etched upon it. Wary that he will look at Hannibal, and like the prophet who saw death written on the faces of those upon whom they looked, he would see the man above him and know how this all will end.

It's easier to forget when you commit someone to memory only by the actions of their body, rather than all the fond words that came to nothing.

Will does not turn more. He settles to his back again and presses his tongue between his lips, wide eyes seeking quickly across Hannibal's features. If he will see the death of them, he will face it rather than hide from it.

It's little dramatic thoughts like that one that make Will's neuroses seem almost reasonable.

In answer, Hannibal does little more than kiss him again, rocking down against Will harder, enough to draw sounds from him, at length a snort of laughter. He pulls back enough to tilt Will's head with a nudge of his own, fingers wrapping in Will's hair to tug it just enough to arch him up.

This, Hannibal still finds surprising in the most pleasing way; how Will adores being overpowered, adores being turned and twisted and taken just as much as he enjoys the softness after, when Hannibal worships his body with kisses and falls asleep against him. His entire body tenses in anticipation of this. He is an addict of him, in awe of the blue eyes and clever mouth and the mind behind both. Hannibal would keep him in bed just like this, hours and hours on end, just seeing how much they both could take before exhaustion took them both instead.

“When do you begin work?” Hannibal purrs against him, and Will can do nothing but laugh, almost nervous, almost shy.

“Fuck... three – four hours?”

“Plenty of time, then.”

Will squirms more, legs hooking up over Hannibal's hips, pressing close and groaning at the way they rub together so damn well, how fucking good it feels, how new this is.

“For what?”

“Taking,” Hannibal suggests, smiling, ducking his head further to kiss Will's clavicle, to kiss lower. “Recovery.” Lower, sighing over a nipple before Hannibal bypasses it to Will's breathed curse and another bout of squirming. “More taking perhaps, if endurance is on our side this morning.”

“Ambitious.” Will sucks his stomach in, a meager attempt at escape, and releases muscle and breath alike with a grin when Hannibal pursues even still. Broad hands set to Will's hips to hold him in place, enough, not pushing hard enough to stop the delightful little thrusts from the man seeking for Hannibal's mouth to move lower still.

“You'd be surprised how far the power of positive thinking can take you,” Hannibal murmurs.

“So far it's gotten me a few good dinners, fantastic sex, and a book worth forty-grand and much more beyond.”

“You see?” Hannibal smiles, and Will can only laugh.

The sound cracks into a moan when Hannibal strokes the tip of his tongue along Will's cock. He nuzzles alongside the stiffening shaft, breathing in the musk and sweat and pheremones from between Will's legs, gathering dark, thick curls of hair between his lips to tug them straight and feel them curl again when they slip free. Dragging his nose against the join of Will's thigh, Hannibal tastes here, too, where Will holds his legs wide and trembling, and the sensation of the older man's tongue spread broad and flat into that crease is enough for Will to explode with laughter, writhing frantically to escape.

“Not there – p-please, Hannibal, really – not – not there – “

“Are you ticklish?” Hannibal asks him, entirely too amused, when Will shakes his head and still squirms and laughs louder when Hannibal nuzzles in the same place again. “Will?”

“No,” Will giggles. “No, fuck *fuck*, Hannibal stop -” The laughter is impossible to stop now, wave after wave of it pouring from Will's throat as Hannibal replaces his tongue and lips with his fingers and kisses Will's stomach instead, nuzzling his navel until he draws a similar reaction there, as well.

It is delightful, Will entirely open in his pleasure this way, entirely, unbelievably happy and allowing himself to be as Hannibal at last relents on the torment and ducks his head to suck kisses against Will's hole instead. The laughter morphs into a deep and needy moan, Will all too happy to slip his knees up over Hannibal's shoulders when he is directed to by careful warm hands. It is a different angle, a different sensation almost entirely, and Will tugs against Hannibal's hair almost brutally, turning him one way or another to get him where he wants him to be.

“Be patient,” Hannibal chastens him, nipping lightly against the ticklish spot one more time before returning to licking long against Will's fever-flushed skin.

The mild scolding draws just as much a reaction as the rimming itself, low moans and shaking hands. Will is lucky, he knows, that Hannibal appreciates his proclivities – not only accepts, tolerates, grudgingly endures, but enthusiastically participates in being the partner Will has always wanted and never had. Will wonders if it's the same for Hannibal – never able to find the partner that suits his tastes quite right. Not given to sexual formality and structure, not given to particular roughness or violence, but still a primal give and take of dominance and submission, as Will plays at struggle only to find himself happily subdued.

If that's so, then they are both very lucky.

As if in punishment for his distraction, Hannibal twists his tongue into Will's hole. His lips close around it, he sucks and thrusts with his mouth all at once, and Will lets loose a sob as he arches upward. Bending almost onto his shoulders, Will holds himself bridged, heels digging bruises into Hannibal's shoulders, back beautifully bent to present himself for Hannibal to devour.

And when a broad hand comes to rest on Will's stomach, pushing him flat again, Will nearly finishes on the spot.

Instead, squirming, he hooks his hands back over the headboard and pulls. His feet shove against Hannibal's back, voice cracking on every breathless moan, he tries to escape. Hopeless, or so he hopes.

A low growl hums through Hannibal's lips, against Will enough to draw another high, barely-voiced curse from him at the sensation. Hannibal catches him around the waist again, tugs him down, again, holds him still with fingers hooked over Will's thighs, keeping him spread and down at once as he returns to enjoying Will like this.

There has always been an enjoyment in play, for Hannibal, always that little thrill at being able to hold another down, for mutual pleasure, at being able to control and demand and take, and then enjoy the softness and forgiveness for it after. Rarely, if ever, has he been able to find men who allow him this, a few women who thought the game amusing, but no one as enthusiastic about it as Will is, no one as determined to get away as they are to be held down and kept still.

He adores him.

The relentless sucking become softer kisses, then warmer nuzzling, and Hannibal rubs himself in a slow arch against the sheets, knowing Will can see, knowing he is imagining, again, Hannibal's cock standing erect, hard and thick and pushing past his lips or cheeks with as much gentleness as possessive demand.

That, too, Hannibal finds nearly undoes him – the hunger Will has for this, genuine and delighted and depraved.

“What next?” Hannibal asks, almost matter of fact, as though they are discussing day plans for a museum, not half-spread and already sweaty in bed at an ungodly hour of the morning.

Hannibal is pleased that his skills at reading others – while nowhere near Will's own – are still keen, as Will begs:

“Your cock, please – I want – “

“What do you want, Will?”

The purr that curls the man’s words nearly undoes Will, who clutches a hand between his legs to squeeze his erection just this side of painful. He curls upward, and finds again that a firm hand rests against his shoulder to bear him slowly back.

“I want to suck you again,” Will asks, his words a whisper, his cheeks scarlet.

As Hannibal smiles, Will starts to sit forward, only to find the older man's weight shifting over him. He straddles Will's thighs, walking on his knees up the length of Will's body and holding him in place with his own. His eyes are calm and dark, a lake during a new moon. His physique is fierce, coiling muscle rippling shadows beneath his skin. His cock -

Oh, his cock.

Solid and stiff, Will can only wonder how the man doesn't get dizzy from the blood required to fill his hardness. Long, yes, enough that his cock points more downward than up, weighed heavy and thick. Girthy, big enough around that Will has to make an effort to fit his mouth around it. Veins run pulsing along the length of velvety skin, the head of his cock concealed by its natural protective sheathe, or nearly concealed, anyway, as Will notices with a groan that his foreskin has slipped back in Hannibal's hardness to reveal the tip of his delicate skin, slit glistening.

A perfect and rare book, from a perfect and rare man, who happens to be the owner of a perfect and rare cock.

It really isn't a bad way to start the morning.

“Right above me,” Will pleads, fingernails curving sharp into Hannibal's thighs. He bends from the bed again, biting his lip, releasing it, coiling wild with unrestraint. “Please, Hannibal,” he asks, and beneath his wild squirming, a mischievous squint briefly narrows his eyes. “Please, Hannibal, let me suck your cock.”

Hannibal sets a hand against Will's forehead, a gently stroke to push his curls back from it, to see his eyes, bright, cheeks dark and pink and lips darker still. The fingers slip gently through Will's hair and hold on, not rough enough to hurt, but certainly enough to control, to deliberately pull Will where he wants him; arched back and lips parted, lying on the mattress, not sitting up off of it as he had wanted to.

It is a strange duality, between what Hannibal knows Will wants, what he can feel his shivering and tension beg for, and what Will claims with his retaliations to want.

He teases the tip of his cock against Will's lips, delights in holding him down firmer when Will tries to lift his head and take him in, relishing the moan of frustration, the curses aimed his way, before finally allowing Will to wrap his lips around him and suck him down.

“You look so beautiful like this,” Hannibal tells him, voice rough, eyes dark and hooded as he watches Will suck against him as a thirsty man would water. He allows Will a little more, sets his free hand to the headboard so as not to crush Will or choke him in a way he won't enjoy. “Entirely willing, and entirely untamed.”

Will can say nothing to this, not with his lips secured firm around the thick head of Hannibal’s cock, but his eyes respond, growing heavy-lidded – his cheeks respond, burning darker. He hums, and when the vibrations from his woefully empty throat carry upward and resonate through Hannibal’s sensitive skin, the older man groans.

Setting his fingers to Hannibal’s thighs, firm muscles clenching around his face, Will holds him there. The heat of Hannibal’s body is nearly oppressive, he smells of sweat and musk. Will is dizzy with it. His heart speeds as Hannibal pushes deeper, and Will curls his tongue in response, guiding the man’s cock against the roof of his mouth and past, and hollowing his cheeks.

He digs his heels into the bed, pushing upward, finding no freedom and hardly any room to squirm at all beneath Hannibal. Will’s fingernails dig red half-circles into his legs, one releasing to stretch for his own cock. Of course, *of course* he finds himself stopped by a firm hand around his wrist – not painful or even uncomfortable, but enough to stop his seeking fingers.

Will pulls sucking against Hannibal’s cock, obscene sounds clicking wet where his lips press against the man’s stiff dick. And then he whines, and tries to reach despite Hannibal’s grip, eyes flashing devious.

Hannibal twines their fingers together and tilts his head, eyes hooded and dark, lips parted with every suck against him. He allows Will more, another inch, another, in the stead of the man stroking himself. Will’s eyes flicker, his throat works as he adjusts to this new angle, this new girth, and Hannibal is entirely enthralled by him.

So he gives him more.

As much to watch Will struggle to swallow as to feel how his entire body spasms with pleasure at the sensation. Will’s free hand snakes down again, another reach for his cock, before he stops, changes his mind, and grips hard against Hannibal’s ass instead.

It feels good, it feels so fucking good, and Hannibal arches his back with a curse, a laughed little moan, and starts fucking Will’s mouth in earnest, slow, deep thrusts.

Forced to breathe through his nose, Will’s breath quickens into bursts, a small sound carried on each, high and needy for this, for more, for Hannibal. The bones of their fingers press almost painfully together as Will squeezes – his back bridges from the bed as much and as little as it can. He holds his grip on the older man’s ass just to feel those muscles clench and harden with every thrust. This, in particular, is always a favorite feeling for Will – the

movement of powerful strokes into him, tension and release. His cock twitches up from his belly in response, yet untouched, and a glistening thread of precome snaps free from the tip of his cock to add to the slick pool beneath.

Hannibal's cock fills his mouth – more than, in truth. Will's lips are scarlet from sucking, from being fucked this way, smeared with spit he can't control nearly as well as his gag reflex, even as Hannibal curls his spine and rocks deeper still. The tip of his cock, poking free of its foreskin, rubs the back of his throat, eases from it, pushes again as if seeking deeper and Will blinks away the reflexive tears in his eyes and lifts them wide to Hannibal, adoring and helpless to it.

And then with perfect control – though it sounds as if he is not – Will gags just enough for his throat to click, heart pulsing up through his throat that tightens, choking once, around Hannibal's cock.

"Fuck," Hannibal groans, leaning forward enough to press his forehead to the wall behind Will, Hannibal's lips parted wide and slack in his pleasure, as more and more sounds pull from him, and motion by motion his thrusts grow erratic and stuttering.

He does not want to stop, he cannot, in truth, if he wanted to. He laughs before licking his lips and ducking his head to see Will properly again, hair smeared against the wall where he presses.

"You are going to make me come so damn hard," he breathes, watching Will's expression fall to blissful laxity at the words as he chokes again. "Down your throat or on your lips, I wonder..."

Anywhere, Will wants to say. Everywhere. It is a debasement and a gift, all at once, to be made filthy by the pleasure he gives to Hannibal far more eagerly than he takes his own. He can feel every groan from the man resonate in his groin, every hitched breath shorten his own, every unsteady thrust mirrored by his own hips against empty air. He feels the suction of his own lips as if he were the one being sucked instead.

As cock-hungry as he's admittedly always been, Will rarely lets himself be seen so clearly as this. Even rarer does he allow another to be taken so deeply into himself. He has missed it, or it's near enough to missing – Will isn't sure he's ever let someone so close, let alone so quickly.

A keening whine reverberates from deep in his chest, wanting to see Hannibal's pleasure writ clear across his face, and feel the heat of it on his own. Though his eyelids hood, heavy with a euphoria that pulls him out of his own body and into another, Will does not let them close entirely – no, not when someone as beautiful and gentle as Hannibal is taking him so roughly that Hannibal himself can hardly hold back from it.

It is primal, aching, relentless, and when Hannibal comes he reaches back to take Will in hand and stroke him, quick wrist and deliberate twist at the tip until he, too, is moaning helplessly and allowing his body to spasm in pleasure.

Hannibal pulls free quickly enough for the last few drops to smear against Will's panting mouth, down over his chin. He watches Will, panting and grinning in pleasure, eyes glazed with how far into his own mind he had gone, and brings his hand to his own lips to suck his fingers clean.

Will's lips part in sympathy, a moan aching raw from his sore throat, chest heaving to take in air that was withheld from him for so long. He lifts his shaking hands to Hannibal's hips, palming over pointed bones and up his soft stomach, curling finally in the hair on his chest. They smell of sex and sweat, intoxicating and dizzying, such a heady mixture of release and sensation that when Hannibal lays heavy over Will and seeks to kiss him, Will can hardly return the gesture. Spit and semen mingle together, wonderfully messy, and Will slips his arms up over Hannibal's neck to keep him close and feel their hearts beat together.

Only then does Will remember the book beside his bed, and the thought of it makes him laugh, just a single sweet note, entirely earnest in his delight. It's a reassurance that he forgot about it, to realize that he has not done this for any reason but bringing pleasure to them both. Some part of him – hooked deep and always pulled taut – releases suddenly, and he breathes against Hannibal's mouth.

"If you're not careful, I won't ever want you to leave."

Hannibal just kisses him again, nuzzling soft and warm against Will's cheek, his nose, his lips. He strokes the back of his hand down the side of Will's face and draws his thumb gently just beneath his eye.

"If you're not careful," he replies, "I might just stay."

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

> *“Maybe,” relents Will, smile twitching to the corner of his mouth before he smooths it. “Hell if I know what he sees in me. There’s not exactly a goddamn market for forty year-old book traffickers with a near-pathological habit of being an asshole and a really remarkable string of miserably failed relationships.”*
>
> *“You’re not forty yet,” Bev points out.*

Chapter Notes

> Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

The bell clatters, not a jangle but a crash, as the door flings inward. Will nearly slips off his stool and grabs the edge of the counter, hissing a curse as he pushes his glasses back up his nose.

“Look what the cat dragged in,” he says. “Or look what the Katz dragged in, I guess. But that doesn’t make any sense, really –”

“You wouldn’t want to start doing that now,” Bev answers. “Not when you’ve been so successful being erratic.”

She unshoulders her bag, immediately making herself at home in the cramped little shop. Daylight filters through windows too long unwashed and Will folds his arms on the counter, watching her approach with the kind of wariness reserved for stray animals that may or may not be feral. Or rabid.

“Did you get your *Scaramouche*?”

“Sure did, once you dropped off the auction,” she responds, quirking a brow. “Weren’t you watching it?”

“I’ve been busy.”

“Busy?” Bev snorts, coming close enough, now, to fold her arms over the counter as Will has his, and rest her face close enough that both need to squint to see. “You’re never fucking

busy. Your ‘busy’ is stealing rare and beautiful things from under my nose and selling them on to assholes who won’t appreciate them.”

“This is why I stopped collecting,” Will shrugs. “Makes life fucking easier when you don’t have to let the books go once you’ve obtained them.”

“They really are like our own children aren’t they.”

“God forbid.”

Bev grins, pushes to stand up, leaning her weight on the counter, still, and tilts her head. “So seriously, what’s with you lately? No unwelcome calls at ungodly hours, no fighting you for the books I want and you don’t actually give a shit for.” She cocks her hips and crosses her arms. “Did Will Graham finally get laid?”

“If I say ‘no’, will you believe me?”

Her grin pulls wider. “You’re a lot of things, Graham, but you’re not a liar.”

Will snorts. “How about ‘fuck off’ then?”

He knows he’s lost the battle from the moment that he lets his gaze slip from hers. Just past her shoulder, nearly correct and yet not, much like the man himself. Much like his work. Much like his goddamn life, really.

“Spill.”

“No,” he answers, and this time it’s not a lie. He leans back, well-worn cardigan bunching beneath his arms as he folds them over his chest. Katz laughs, and spreading her hands against the finger-printed glass, lets her voice slip to a groan.

“You’re a miserable shit, Graham,” she says, with a genuine affection. “Don’t act like you haven’t been dying to tell someone. Come on, we can go get coffee and –”

Will feels the color sink from his face, filter past the knot in his throat, and pool in the sinking cavern where his belly once was. “No,” he says, shaking his head. “No coffee, I don’t –”

“Like coffee? Please,” she answers. “There’s a spot around the corner, couple blocks.”

“I know it,” he says. Rather than try to ease the tension from his voice, he tightens it instead, cuts short his words, curt and displeased. “It’s terrible. They – they put milk in it, even when I tell them I want it black. The baked goods are fucking pretentious. It’s crowded and –”

And the proprietor has been an absolute distraction for the better part of the morning, and the day before, and the week before that, and near every waking goddamn moment. Will has found himself fixated, as he’s only ever been on particularly rare books he’s sought out or strays that need more attention than most. The mornings that they haven’t woken together, Will has reached for Hannibal in bed anyway. Finding the sheets cool and empty, he lies awake and thinks of the way his eyes crinkle when he smiles, the subtle means by which he

has fed and spoiled Will, the fascinating hints of history revealing themselves in illuminated inches and the inches – and inches – between his legs and by that point, Will's rutting himself against the mattress like a bewildered schoolboy and going through changes of sheets faster than he can do laundry.

"Jesus, you're fucking blushing," Beverly notes, brows raised. "That good, huh?"

Will sighs, and yields, ducking his head and muttering towards his chest. "He makes breakfast every morning, he's hung like a fucking Clydesdale, and he got me a white end-papers *Moby-Dick*."

"He's hung like a what?"

Will snorts, shakes his head and lifts it with brows raised. "Don't play coy. You want to know about the book."

"We'll get to the book," Bev laughs. "The book is yours, apparently, and fuck you, but right now, not the most important thing."

Will makes another sound of malcontent and folds his arms over his chest a little tighter, as though holding himself together or trying to keep the rest of the words that want to spill from his lips from actually spilling. He's embarrassed himself enough already, word vomit would just be the cincher on the damn situation. He can't get mushy. He can't get romantic.

Because he isn't, really, he isn't that person.

Will reminds himself of Hannibal's cock, again, instead of thinking of the way soft knuckles trace his jaw before Hannibal leans closer and kisses his lips, breath barely dirtied by the night by some ungodly miracle. He doesn't think of that, because that would be ridiculous and counterproductive and -

"You have got it *bad*."

"Shut up."

"How did you even meet the guy?" Bev asks, then raises her hands as though to stop Will answering. "No, not even that, you look like you do, I always said you had to get out of the damn dust and crappy cardigans and you'd find a man. No, how did you find a guy who will give you a freaking *Moby-Dick* with white end-papers and who also makes breakfast?"

Not only makes breakfast. Brings Will coffee in bed before he starts cooking. Hell, wakes up early – even when he's got to open the cafe – to make sure Will eats before he goes. And feeds Will fresh fruit from his fingers, as Will sits in his lap feeling wonderfully small, and then laps the homemade strawberry syrup from his tongue because Will is a liar sometimes, and he does like sweet things for breakfast, especially when Hannibal is letting Will suck them from his fingers –

"The cafe," he finally answers, and Katz barks a single note of laughter. "He owns it. Fucked up my order the first time, and has been making up for it ever since. Never mind that I'm the

one who should be making up for – well – everything. All of this. Christ."

"God, it's like a romcom," she says.

"Maybe," relents Will, smile twitching to the corner of his mouth before he smooths it. "Hell if I know what he sees in me. There's not exactly a goddamn market for forty year-old book traffickers with a near-pathological habit of being an asshole and a really remarkable string of miserably failed relationships."

"You're not forty yet," Bev points out.

Will sighs, sliding his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "You know I started to blow him off the other morning to get into a pissing-match with Budge? It's like a fucking compulsion, I – I'm too stuck, I don't know how to do this shit and the window on learning it again – it's very narrow at this point."

"Well you're obviously doing alright so far," Bev points out, cocking her hip and resting against the counter. Will sighs and draws a hand through his hair, down over his face, displacing his glasses so he can furiously rub his eyes and groan before sitting back again.

"Maybe."

"Maybe." Bev raises an eyebrow. "You've seen him more than once, right?"

Will hums. She smiles.

"Look. If he's stuck around for more than one bitching session from you, he's a keeper who will keep himself, most likely. You're stressing over shit you shouldn't get into your head because -" She leans over the counter before Will can interrupt her. "- *because* then you'll think of nothing else and you're guaranteed to lose him with your moping bullshit. Be the asshole he apparently loves to fuck on a regular basis."

"If there's one thing I can do well," Will begins, letting the sentence hang unfinished.

He's not convinced. He's not certain he can ever be, really, of the idea that anyone would want to spend extended amounts of time with him voluntarily. But the thought pulls at his chest, spreading warm and liquid, that maybe this time it will work out. Maybe this time he's found someone who complements his own eccentricities, and finds them charming. Maybe he's finally met a person for whom he would try to ease up on being an unrelenting prick, in favor of making them happy – of being happy together. The thoughts build until his ribs feel stretched so far apart that he can hardly breathe for the long moment he lets linger in consideration of it.

It hurts, in the way that old scars sometimes sting long after they've healed.

It hurts, in the way that new experiences can gently wound as one learns them.

Will releases it all with a sigh, and sensing her victory, Bev cocks her head. "At least you won't have to worry about Budge anymore."

And all at once, Will's chest fills again, with daggers and firebrands and his brow furrows deep above his glasses. He holds his breath now not to sustain a pleasant thought, but because it's cut off in his throat, throttled, fucking strangled –

"I fucking knew it," Will mutters, shoving back from the counter to stand and shove his palms against his face to muffle his groan. "I knew he'd do this. Months, almost an entire goddamn year of my life, down the frigging drain. He was never going to let me sell for him. He never once intended to let me anywhere nearer them than to flaunt the goddamn things. Christ, a year I let him cocktease me about them – who'd he give them to? I swear to *God* if that deal went to Froideveaux I'll hang myself right here in the window."

Bev blinks, tilts her head, watching Will pull himself into near hysteria over this, and lets him have his space. Only when there is a pause long enough for a groan, not a word, that she calmly tells him, "He's dead."

"I –" Will's brows furrow and his lips part, hanging open, still, having wound himself up enough for a louder come-back to whatever Bev was about to tell him. "What?"

"He's dead," Bev repeats, shrugging. "Gone. Six feet under, soon. Well, maybe, unless he wanted to be cremated or something."

"How do you know?"

"The fact that you don't tells me a lot about how much spare time you've had lately," Bev smiles, tilting her head again and moving to sit down again. She was never one for stillness, always moving, always shifting, folding paper or rolling up receipts or tapping her pen against the table or jiggling her leg against the floor. Perpetual motion.

"Shit."

Bev shrugs again. "His entire collection is up for auction, now. Not as a whole, piece by piece. Apparently he had something in his will about donating them but the wording was unclear to whom, so up they go tomorrow. It'll be a shitstorm. I'd go spend the night with your man again and bribe him with whatever that mouth can do to feed you coffee for a week straight if you want even a single book from that estate."

"Goddammit," Will sighs. Just as quickly as he surged up from his stool in a frantic fury, he drops, deflated, to sit once more.

Katz echoes his sigh, brow lifted. "Still going to hang yourself?"

"What's the point?" he answers. "Hell, if he'd given them to someone else, at least then that's – that's like being dumped, you can get over that. This is just – poof. I can't even entertain the vague notion – however goddamn slim my chances were – that he'll go in for it now." Slowly, so slowly, Will's shoulders curve forward, his arms raise. He folds them on the counter and buries his head in them, voice echoing from the glass beneath his face. "I should have taken his offer."

"Why? You wouldn't have gotten any of them then, either."

“I might have if he were going to die this soon,” Will snorts. “He was young, he seemed – you know. Fit. What the hell happened?”

“It’s still an ‘ongoing police investigation’,” Bev gestures with her fingers. “Someone probably ganked him for the books, if they knew how much they were worth. Or his attitude, if they’d ever met him.”

“Murder?”

“It’s actually not statistically uncommon,” Bev points out, somewhat amused, entirely uncaring. Will just frowns at her. “Apparently it was pretty messy, but whoever it was was very good. No trace evidence, no clumsy mistakes.”

“A hit?”

“Unlikely, Budge would get up our ass but he didn’t have enemies in the mob, he’s too much of an insignificant dork with a superiority complex. Most likely someone out for a personal vendetta who watches enough crime shows on TV to know enough how to cover their tracks.”

Will blinks at her. “How the hell do you know this stuff?”

“The first book I pawned off was the *Anarchist’s Cookbook*,” she grins.

“You’re morbid.”

“I will take that as a compliment coming from you,” Bev laughs, drawing a hand through her long hair and twisting it up into a messy knot at the back of her head. She leans over and grabs one of Will’s pencils not yet used down to a stub and pins the entire mess into place. “So do I get to meet the hot coffee guy through you or do I have to stalk him down on my own?”

“Neither.”

“The latter it is then.”

“Please,” begs Will. “Please don’t. It’s too weird. Book traffickers infiltrating his cafe, leaving our dust and bits of old covers everywhere. What would you even say to him? Nothing, there’s nothing you can say –”

“I can ask if he knows he’s been compared to a draft horse.”

“You could,” Will agrees. “You could do that, and I could spend every waking hour escalating the bids for every single book you ever want to buy again. I’ll take you there,” he relents. “I’ll take you sometime.”

He fights down a smile at the words, pursing his lips together instead, into a vague disapproval. It isn’t the worst thing in the world, though, to introduce a friend – his only, really – to his… whatever he and Hannibal are together. Hell, it’s almost normal. They could have dinner together. Katz would say something inappropriate and Hannibal would make a

delicately worded pun to echo it. Will would be mortified by the both of them and secretly pleased to spend time with the only two bipedal others in his life.

“After the auctions,” Bev reassures him, seeking out her bag to sling over her shoulder. “We’ll compare wins and gloat at each other.”

“What part of that is supposed to reassure me that this is a good idea?” Will snorts, amused.

“The part where I get to gloat,” she laughs, and Will watches her go until the bell above the door stops jangling.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“You missed a button,” Will notes, brows lifting.

Hannibal ducks his head to look and when he sighs a laugh, Will feels no tension in him. Just mild, exhausted amusement.

“Flour,” he notes, “when mixed with water creates a substance quite alike to cement. I did not notice the stain until I was almost entirely out of the house and on my way to you.”

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

By the fourth hour, Will has developed a system.

One coffee at the top of the hour. Bathroom break at the half, with a second coffee refill on his way back. Every other hour sees the dogs let in or out, whichever one they prefer. One bid on each book from the Budge estate, just to get it in his history and to mask his buying patterns for anyone – *Katz* – keeping track of his preferences and looking to screw him. Every third bid she makes, he increases by half her first bid, just to see if she notices.

By the sixth hour, she sends him a text telling him to knock it off.

By the seventh hour, he gets another message, but it’s from Hannibal asking if he’s busy. Will is, of course, busy. He’s extremely busy surveying how many books he’s going to lose to other people that he can’t stand because Budge had to go and get himself murdered and Will’s not slept more than a few hours in two days because he can’t stop thinking about how the man was butchered in his own home and Will starts to reply with all of this to Hannibal before deleting it.

He asks if he wants to come over instead, but forewarns him that he’s working.

Hannibal asks if he’d prefer wine or coffee, and Will says both.

Will sets an automatic bid on the two books he wants the most in the collection and greets Hannibal at the door with a kiss. A kiss and rough hands in the man’s hair and a moan into

his mouth and chests pressing close together and hips rubbing until -

“Still working,” Will gasps, biting his lip and cursing, even as Hannibal presses his lips to Will’s temple and tells him gently that he will bring him a cup of coffee momentarily. Will watches him, watches the dogs swarm him, and turn to get back to the computer before he is distracted by the way Hannibal bends over to get something from his bag because *Jesus Christ –*

Will buries himself in the bids again.

It is much darker when Hannibal runs a hand through his hair and tugs it gently out of his eyes, and Will blinks up at him.

“Dinner,” Hannibal tells him with a smile. “I took the liberty, as the last four coffees were met with little more than a hum, I guessed food has not been a priority for several days. You must eat.”

Will sighs, not the burdened snort of irritation that usually greets any and all interruptions, but a long, easier thing. He lets his head rest back, strained eyes slipping blissfully closed beneath the firm hand that strokes his curls. After a few peaceful moments, he reaches up to catch Hannibal’s hand, and brings it to his mouth, breathing into his palm.

“Do you ever get so hungry that you’re not even hungry anymore, and even the thought of food makes you queasy?”

Hannibal makes a considering sound. “Not in a very long time. But I do know the solution.”

“What’s that, doctor?”

“Eat.”

Hannibal leans low to kiss the man’s brow, and Will goes where he’s guided by Hannibal’s hand. He stands with a stretch and a groan, and rubbing his cheek against Hannibal’s palm, starts to glance back towards the computer, only to find himself gently turned away.

“Eat,” Hannibal tells him, leaning in to kiss his cheek, laugh warmly against Will’s skin when he tries to turn away more and Hannibal catches his lips in a kiss instead. “Whatever it is –” Another kiss. “– can wait.” Another, smile widening as Will sets his hands on either side of Hannibal’s face to hold him still. “Until you finish the chicken parmesan I’ve made you.”

“Enabler.”

“Eat,” Hannibal purrs against him, turning his head to nuzzle cheek to cheek before guiding Will to the kitchen to take up his dinner, beautifully plated as always. Only then does Hannibal follow.

“What has you so busy?” he asks, tossing a towel over his arm as he moves around Will’s small kitchen and cleans up the minimal mess he left after making them a meal.

Will has a forkful in his mouth before he even realizes he's taken it, and he groans around the utensil in almost desperate pleasure. "Christ, that's good."

"Thank you," Hannibal answers with an audible smile.

"You remember that son-of-a-bitch who was keeping me up the other morning? Whenever it was," Will says, motioning carelessly with his fork before digging in again. It's easier, somehow, to brush off the fact that it was weeks before – easier to consider the minimal repercussions of an undefined 'whenever' than to bring to light how long they've been spending time together.

"The financier," Hannibal responds.

"That one. Budge. He died. Well," Will hesitates, finishing his mouthful of food. "That's technically correct, I guess. He was murdered. Pretty horribly if the bits and pieces that made it to the papers are anything to go by. Good papers. I try never to read them – and certainly not toilet paper like Tattle Crime, they've probably got fucking photographs of it," he says. Even the thought of that pulls his words short – not only in disgust for the tabloid, but in the sudden wash of scarlet painted behind his eyes, darkening the palisander floors. He can see the man's house, its comfortable couches and custom-built shelves, welcoming and immaculate all at once. He can see the man himself, well-dressed and always polite, impaled dozens of times through with fragments from one of the enormous glass windows.

Will knows he shouldn't have read the papers. He knows he shouldn't have let himself anywhere near this. But curiosity pulls as hard as disgust, as equally instinctive a response trained into Will over years of homicide work. He tries to shake the thoughts with a quick twist of his head, and mutters towards his plate.

"Anyway. His collection's up for auction, so we're all snarling over it like dogs over scraps. I guess it was expecting too much to think I was the only dealer he was talking to."

Hannibal takes a delicate bite of his dinner, lips wrapping around the fork before he pulls it from between his lips and slowly chews, listening. Will knows he can see the moment his demeanor changes, knows he can see when he falls into his mind just as he sees the moment Will returns. He shakes his head as Hannibal leans over the counter, setting his plate beside Will's to be closer to him.

"I've gotten a few, those that I knew the others wouldn't vie for, but the rest –"

"This is the man whose entire collection you envied?"

"That everyone envied."

Hannibal hums and ducks his head to look at his food as he carefully cuts another piece of chicken with his fork, the meat soft enough that it almost flakes on the plate.

"I suppose it is very good, then," Hannibal says, amusement curling his lips into something both mischievous and soft. "That I brought several kinds of coffee to pamper you with tonight."

Will feels his own smile mirror, the slight awkward bow of his head, the click of his fork against the plate. He leaves it there, the dish bare, and circles to stand behind Hannibal instead. Pressing his brow between the older man's shoulders, he nuzzles along his spine, rubs his cheek across the muscles of his back, and sighs warm breath against the expensive soft fabric of his shirt to feel it pool back against his lips.

He sets his hands to Hannibal's narrow hips, and runs his palms down across his lower stomach and the taut vee of muscle he knows to be there. Upward, then, over the buttons of his shirt, caressing the soft stomach that belies none of the strength beneath, and it's here that Will loops his arms.

It's simple. Domestic. Eating dinner together and asking after the other's day, squeezing close to them after missing them for even those few hours apart. Or it should be all of that, anyway, but considering how many of Will's relationships began in a bed – or a bathroom, or a stairwell – and ended less than an hour after that, this is a rather terrifying new terrain. It seems easy. Too easy. The kind of easy akin to walking across an open field of wildflowers and knowing it's full of landmines.

He sighs, to shake off the cloud for now, and span his fingertips up the buttons of Hannibal's shirt.

"How was work?" Will asks against Hannibal's back, wishing his voice didn't sound so small – so entirely weak to the man against whom he leans.

Hannibal just barely turns his head, sets one hand over Will's own, not to stop him, but to feel the way his fingers stretch and splay before curling around one button and carefully working it open. He smiles, hums, just a soft breath of sound.

"Busy," he murmurs. "Dull, without the usual table by the window occupied by someone endlessly clicking keyboard keys or silently cursing their phone."

The fondness is clear, it is warm like butter and Will feels himself shiver from it. *Too easy* he reminds himself, and just as quickly tells his inner inhibitions to shut up. "The atmosphere was probably lighter, then, without the distraction,"

"The day crawled," Hannibal sighs, biting his lip gently as Will works open another button and Hannibal's fingers guide him to a third. "Waves of clients, one after another, the lulls between filled with the restless need to create something for those coming later, and for the one not there."

"You missed me," Will asks, sighing the words he knows are true – he knows without hearing them – but wanting to hear them anyway.

"Very much," agrees Hannibal, as another button slips undone. "I missed you very much."

The words sing through Will – reassurance of knowing that his pathetic pining did not go unrequited, a thrill that this exceptional man thought of him so often. He makes a pleased sound, hummed against Hannibal's back, and lets thoughts of the ongoing battle for books

fall aside in favor of the far gentler skirmish over Hannibal's shirt. He seeks a little higher, and finds an empty buttonhole, fingers stilling for a moment.

"You missed a button," Will notes, brows lifting.

Hannibal ducks his head to look and when he sighs a laugh, Will feels no tension in him. Just mild, exhausted amusement.

"Flour," he notes, "when mixed with water creates a substance quite alike to cement. I did not notice the stain until I was almost entirely out of the house and on my way to you."

Hannibal turns a little more to look at Will, eyes hooded and smile little and expression so entirely open and warm and welcoming that for a moment Will forgets how to breathe. Hannibal's lips part, just a little, just enough to gently click before he closes them again and breathes out slowly through his nose.

"Have I ruined your impression of me with the slip of a button?" he murmurs, delighted by Will's little sigh before he kisses his cheek. "Look what you made me do," he chastens him fondly.

The sound Will makes this time, unbidden, is far less sweet and winsome. Hannibal's words move like hands over his skin, they caress and snare, they hold him fast and while not ungentle, keep him captive. He shudders, and moves to the next button.

"Getting your clothes dirty," Will mutters, fond disapproval echoed in his words. "Forgetting how to dress yourself. You're falling to pieces, doctor, and you say it's my fault?"

"Entirely. Driven to distraction by a man who did not even shadow my doorstep with his presence today." He presses his tongue between his lips and sighs when Will reaches the top of his shirt, and with a careless hand, tugs his tie loose with a little jerk. "The polite thing to do would be to apologize."

Will considers this with a hum before his lips part against Hannibal's back. His teeth scrape against the man's shirt, the heat of the skin he can feel beneath, and he pulls Hannibal's tie – a dizzying floral swirl – free entirely.

"Or I could make amends in another way," Will suggests. "If I didn't know better, I'd imagine that you arranged this all just to have me in that position. Very clever, doctor."

Hannibal smiles, allows his shirt to be stripped from him, the tie still between Will's fingers, though he watches, waits, until it ends up on the floor. He would hardly care if it did, and that alone speaks volumes to what Will means to him, to who he is to him.

Their dinner is eaten, forgotten, dishes left on the counter for whenever they finish and Hannibal seeks to keep the house clean. He relishes the feeling of Will's hands over his chest, fingers slipping through the warm hair there, always adoring, always near-worshipful of the masculinity of it. It is rare Hannibal has had such a response to it, to himself, and he finds that every time Will repeats the gestures, every time he moans that gentle soft little noise of pleasure, his entire body feels electric.

“I was thinking that perhaps,” Hannibal holds his breath when Will’s fingers circle a nipple, gently pinch it and tug it before letting go. “I would coax an apology from you. With lips and tongue and teeth. That would be a much fairer reckoning.”

“After you just drove all the way the hell out here?” Will laughs. “And brought four kinds of coffee, and wine, and made me dinner? A fantastic dinner,” he adds, before biting his lip and shaking his head. “I don’t think that’s very fair at all.”

Will slips his hands across the older man’s stomach, relishing the way it twitches beneath his fingers, savoring how his body hair thins and then thickens again as Will breaches the waistband of his pants. He works loose Hannibal’s belt, tugs down the fly, and finds his wrists held before he can shove them into the front of the man’s trousers. When Hannibal turns to him, pressing Will’s hands to his cheeks instead, Will’s heart stutters.

No.

It stumbles.

“I insist,” Hannibal intones, eyes crinkled in amusement, and Will goes when Hannibal pushes Will’s back to the counter instead and seeks a consuming kiss. He returns it. He leaves his hands where Hannibal set them, and is grateful for the moment that Hannibal cannot see the furrow that has set to Will’s brow. Like an elevator dropping too quickly, his stomach sinks.

Will thinks of the missed button.

He thinks of the hurried change of clothes.

He thinks of firm hands encircling his wrists and he hopes the sound he makes reads as eager.

Hannibal’s hands are gentle in their guidance, but firm, in a way that Will immediately tries to fight. As he always does. With this, with work, with his entire goddamn life. Hannibal holds Will down enough to kiss over his cheek and down his throat and to his collarbone. He does not work Will’s shirt open, yet, does not let Will go, yet, not until some of the tension eases from the man before him and Hannibal can press his teeth to his earlobe and get a response that he knows is genuine.

He wonders how long it has been since Will has slept, how long it will be until he does, work holding him captive this way by choice and obsession both. He presses Will against the counter harder, turns their hands to be palm to palm and rocks their hips together.

Will is hard, if only from the fact that Hannibal is here and holding him captive against the counter. He is hard enough, but not eager, not in the way he has been when Hannibal would find claw marks against his arms the next morning, relish in the stretch of skin when he did.

“I have been thinking about you all day,” Hannibal tells him, nuzzling gently against Will’s face, kissing his stubbled cheek. “The way you would grumble when I made you dinner, how you would refuse my mouth against your cock.” The consonants click and Hannibal’s smile widens a little as Will takes a breath. Slowly, he brings Will’s hand down to press between his

legs, where he had tried to get to before, when Hannibal had stopped him to do this instead. “Let me spoil you before you take your fill of me.”

The throbbing ridge beneath Will’s hand elicits a moan from him, not just because it always does, but now in desperate relief. He curves his grip around Hannibal’s cock, the heavy bulge pushing back against his fingers, and strokes clumsily where Hannibal holds his hand in place. He enjoys this, so much so that to call it enjoyment is an understatement. He revels in Hannibal’s kindness and his care, in his mind and his body, he wants this to work and he wants to work for this but Christ, there’s still something scratching at the base of Will’s skull and he can’t shake it, even when Hannibal releases Will’s hand to seek out his belt in turn.

Too much concern about a man, now dead, that he might have called his enemy in life.

Too little sleep and too much stress.

Will doesn’t know. And when Hannibal presses his lips over Will’s and parts them with his tongue and a low rumble, Will can’t bring himself to care.

He snares a finger in the band of Hannibal’s briefs to tug them low, but another swift hand catches him. Will tries with a laugh to twist away but Hannibal pins his hand back to the counter instead, and growls a low warning against his mouth.

“Fuck off,” Will grins, and the dark eyes that meet his own narrow, even as Hannibal crooks a brow.

“Rude, Will.”

He arches his body up against Hannibal’s, as if to buck him free, delight shuddering past his lips in a wanton sound when Hannibal uses his weight to hold Will in place. Teeth against his throat lift Will’s voice higher. A firm leg set between his own to part them nearly weakens his knees to collapse. Will has never had it so good, equal parts adoration and affection and reckless desire, and Hannibal just as rough and dominant as he is caring and kind.

They fuck beautifully. They snuggle and speak and exist together beautifully.

And for now, at least, for this moment, little matters more than that.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

“Do you want me to come by?” Will asks. A simple question, loaded to the breaking point.

“If you like,” Hannibal answers, and Will feels the weight of burden crack against his ribs.

“That’s not an answer.”

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

Hannibal doesn’t come in the morning, as he has made a habit of doing, to give Will his coffee and his kiss, and Will, in turn, decides not to go to the coffee shop and impose his company on the man who Will assumes to be very delicately trying to break free of Will’s hold on him.

The sleepless nights - due to bidding and good fucking both - have yielded Will five books from the collection, two of which he had genuinely celebrated buying up. Rare and beautiful and worth much more than what he had managed to bid on them and win. There are six currently in circulation that he has his eye on, periodically checking the bids and the movement of the auction when he isn’t contacting clients regarding his new acquisitions.

Hannibal comes in the late afternoon, instead. Hair gently messed by the wind and apron still tied around his hips, he presents Will with a large cup of something that smells exceptional and a warm kiss to his cheek.

“Quite the morning,” he complains gently. “Apparently someone saw fit to leave a graciously kind review of the cafe on social media and we have seen a surge of people take up all but one of the tables inside.” Hannibal kisses Will again, on the lips this time, and smooths his hair back from his forehead with a smile. “I suppose that one would have happily been occupied as well, had it not the reserved sign resting on the tabletop.”

Will’s eyes dart across Hannibal’s features, as if seeking for some clear sign of his fate, and he finds nothing but warmth and a quiet exhaustion. He knows that he is the cause of the former, and this is enough that he kisses Hannibal gently again, gathering their lips together

in a soft, simple touch. He wonders if he is equally the cause of the latter, putting Hannibal out of a table, harrying his thoughts by way of merely existing.

“Do you want me to come by?” Will asks. A simple question, loaded to the breaking point.

“If you like,” Hannibal answers, and Will feels the weight of burden crack against his ribs.

“That’s not an answer.”

Will says it with a smile, or the most convincing thing near to it that he can manage, anyway. Hannibal now, too, searches Will’s face, and whatever he sees in it softens his expression in increments. Will notices, when the lines around his eyes smooth, but the muscles beneath pull upward. He notices because he can’t help but notice.

Hannibal sets a hand against the side of Will’s face and just strokes there, gentle, entirely gentle. “If you like,” he repeats, but there is no malice there, no sarcasm or patronizing tone. “I always enjoy having you near me, but I may need to excuse myself early this evening for rest, if this week is to be as busy as this morning had been.”

An elegant brow raises and Hannibal tilts his head when Will’s only answer is to swallow, brows furrowing slightly enough to form only the barest wrinkles on his forehead. Hannibal gently draws a thumb over them until they smooth.

“I would not be opposed to being exhausted by you,” he adds. “It would be a much more enjoyable and fulfilling way to spend time with you than to just sleep against you all evening.”

Will wouldn’t mind that, he wants to say. He would enjoy watching Hannibal sleep, he would enjoy stroking fingers across his chest or rubbing his back, as inch by inch rest falls lovely and serene over the older man’s features. He wants to say that he wishes for little more than that, really, the caretaking and sex aside.

He wants normalcy. Quiet. Content ease in the presence of another who doesn’t think of Will as too much or too little.

But that isn’t up to Will, and so he simply nods. If Hannibal wanted to sleep beside him, he would make it clear. If Hannibal wanted to see him tonight, he would hardly take Will’s reserve as an answer. If he wanted Will –

If. If. If.

“I understand,” Will says, honest, because he does understand all the things that Hannibal says and all the things he doesn’t say. He understands preferring to be alone, and he understands preferring to not be with someone. Tilting his cheek up into Hannibal’s palm, Will rests there for a moment, before brushing a dry kiss against the older man’s hand and offering him a sympathetic smile. “Go rest. Or, you know. Work. And then – whatever you need to do. Thank you for the coffee.”

Hannibal's expression is almost unreadable for a moment before he nods, returns the smile, strokes his thumb over Will's lips before kissing him properly and pulling away.

"In the morning," he promises, "I have a surprise for you."

In the morning, the surprise is a new coffee blend that has Will's eyes rolling back into his head with pleasure, and a sound pulling from his chest that is damn near orgasmic. Hannibal watches him, he resists the urge to kiss his neck and tug his soft shirt and worn cardigan down his shoulder to kiss there too. Instead, he murmurs promises against Will's ear about what the evening will hold for them once Hannibal's shift finishes, and Will has won himself more books for his collection.

The promises are remembered, accepted, and although few are fulfilled that evening, enough are that they lie tangled in damp sheets, trying to catch their breath while a small fan whirs in the corner. Hannibal sleeps curled so tightly around Will the other wonders why he even allows doubts to creep into his mind that this is less than what he imagines it could be.

Hannibal leaves before dawn, kisses tickled down Will's shoulder and his arm, and a steaming cup of coffee is left on the bedside table before Hannibal quietly takes his leave.

Will works from home. He gets two more books and three messages from Hannibal while he's at work, one of which apologizes that he cannot see Will this evening due to some unexpected work at the cafe.

Will pulls up the website for it just to confirm what he already knows, and the words leave a scarlet afterburn behind his eyes as he rubs them into seeing stars.

Hours: 6AM – 4PM

To say nothing of the fact that Hannibal left early to go in and begin the day's baking. To say nothing of the vaguery of his message - *unexpected work* indeed. To say nothing of the rising tide of doubt that has ebbed and flowed in Will for days before, leaving a higher watermark each time.

The mysterious absences and longer responses to Will's texts.

The inexplicable exhaustion and changing shifts at the cafe.

The missed buttons and insistences that Hannibal be the one to work Will to pleasure, rather than the other way around.

"It's not like you didn't know," Will says to himself, fingers tapping an erratic staccato against the keys before he finally closes the tab to Hannibal's cafe. "You fucking knew better, Graham. Christ."

From the start, Hannibal was out of his league. It stands to reason that Hannibal would, finally, decide the same for himself, once the sheen of newness wore off and Will's mouth couldn't continue to compensate for his deficits everywhere else. Hannibal is the kind of man to visit the symphony, to take in museums, to seek out rare and challenging new foods and to

do all the things that Will has little knowledge of and littler interest in. What does Will do? He gives good head and he hoards books, before prostituting them out to the highest bidder. He dresses in ill-fitting clothes covered by a thin veneer of dog fur and he lives inconveniently far enough that even the prospect of being fuck-buddies stops making sense after a while, when Hannibal can surely do better for himself.

Pathetic. It's goddamn pathetic that Will let himself imagine this as more than it was. It's pathetic that he had finally started to let down his walls and allow for even the possibility that they might actually –

That Hannibal might be –

That Will might have found –

"Stop," Will tells himself, palms still pressed to his eyes. "Fucking stop."

He doesn't reply to Hannibal's message. He doesn't reply to his morning call. He does not go into the coffee shop though he does see the "reserved" sign on the table he usually occupies by the window. Surely if Hannibal is cutting ties there is no use trying to catch the ends and work them to fraying knots to hold this together. Will should be passing him the knife. He most likely did, already, by being everything he is.

This lasted longer than most other relationships of this kind have for him. Months, not weeks, not days, not a quick fondle and fingering in a ratty bathroom at an auction house. This was something, and it's not something anymore.

Simple.

Clean.

He misses another call from Hannibal that afternoon and does not read the messages that come after. He goes home when he usually does, closes the shop and takes his notebooks with him and watches the ground, not the sky, as he makes his way to his car.

He doesn't take the next call that comes through either, and tells himself it's better not to.

Fuck it.

Will pours himself a handful of whiskey, rather than a few fingers, and throws in a few cubes of ice, listening with a passing satisfaction as they crack.

Fuck all these failed endeavors. His business. His books. His life. All the miserable relationships that have always ended this way. Fuck Hannibal, for that matter, for not being kind enough in this one way to just let Will go rather than drag him along while he seeks elsewhere to have his cake and eat it, too. Most importantly, Will considers as he downs a mouthful of the icy-hot liquor, fuck himself. Fuck Will Graham, who knew damn well that it would come to this. Fuck Will Graham, who knew that - as with everyone he's ever let himself care about - they'd reach a day when he'd look across Hannibal's face and know it was ending, possibly before the man himself even did.

It's a goddamn cruelty to be deprived even the blissful ignorance of denial. What fucking good is a *hypersensitive empathy disorder* when all it ever shows you is how much empathy every other person in the world lacks?

He's halfway through his whiskey when he stalks into the bathroom to rub himself off one last time to the thought of big hands and purred words and a thick cock and gentle morning nuzzles. That, at least, he can have before it's officially fucking over, but even as Will spills hot against a wad of tissue, it's lost its satisfaction entirely. He sits for a moment, and wonders how it's fair that even that pleasure has been denied to him.

He feels empty, not sated.

Hollowed-out and used and tired.

Fuck it.

Fuck all of it.

Will tosses the tissues away and takes a piss, tucking himself away before emerging to find his phone and finish his whiskey. He does the latter first, grimacing as the cheap burn singes down his throat. And he's still seeking out the former when the dogs start to bark, and the familiar crunch of gravel is heard in the drive.

Headlights sweep over the front windows and then turn off as the engine cuts. Will doesn't even wait for the man to knock on the door before he has it open, watching Hannibal approach the porch, climb the stairs, and in that infuriatingly kind tone ask if he's alright.

"I tried to call," Hannibal tells him. "I would always hit the voicemail."

"I saw," Will says, and it's enough for Hannibal to pause for a moment, before taking the last step up. Will settles his arms across his chest, empty glass in hand but for the ice remaining within.

"You didn't answer," Hannibal says, and Will averts his eyes from the little smile that's offered to him. "We usually speak often. I was concerned when I hadn't heard from you."

"I know the feeling." Sucking the heat of the liquor from his lower lip, Will adjusts his glasses higher up his nose. It'll be easier here, like this, when Hannibal will go away and Will can go back in and polish off the rest of the bottle and sleep. He lifts his chin a little, jaw working. "How was your 'unexpected work'?"

Hannibal pauses, brows furrowed and head tilted and finally, *finally*, Will thinks, he will be fucking honest with him.

"We were interviewing for a new server," Hannibal says, though his tone is less warm than before, wary, now, as Will is - careful. He does not step closer but stays where he is, regarding Will's posture, his stance, the glass in his hand and the smell of alcohol lingering around him. "It seems traffic at the cafe will not so quickly ease. It is good for business but in the planning process I find myself unable to be as available."

He doesn't make excuses, he doesn't justify anything. He takes a breath and says only, "Will, please tell me what's wrong?"

Weeks of suspicion and doubt reaching a boiling point bubble to the surface, but the laugh that Will manages is hardly more than a sigh. He glances to his glass, as though by some meager blessing it has been refilled. He sucks down the water pooling at the bottom anyway, and sets it on the railing to fold his arms properly.

Building walls again, brick by fucking brick.

"I can put up with a lot of shit, Hannibal. Really. Beggars can't be choosers and I know that, but I can't - I *can't* fucking deal with lying."

Hannibal blinks, and tilts his head a little.

"Here's the thing," Will explains, lifting a hand, then stuffing it back into the crook of his elbow again. "I'm - I understand people. Clinically. I have a - a thing, where people's actions, their expressions, all those things they don't even realize they goddamn do are clear as shouting to me. So someone trying to keep something from me, even if they're really frigging good at it? It's like hiding a fucking elephant in an empty room in broad daylight. I *know* when something's not right. I *know* when someone's not giving me the whole story."

He licks his lower lip into his mouth and tips his chin upward, head turning aside as Hannibal's had moments before.

"So do you want to tell me where you've been, or should I keep going? Honestly," Will adds, with another bitter laugh. "It doesn't really matter either way."

"I -" Hannibal considers the man before him and feels his jaw work. In truth, Will isn't wrong, he isn't *wrong* that there have been things kept and things left unsaid, but all but one - truly - have had nothing to do with Will at all.

"Today I stayed later after my shift," he says again, just a little slower, as though trying to calm a hysterical child. "To interview a new server for the cafe. I have found myself over-tired and unable to come in daily as I have been doing since the cafe opened. I have found myself unwilling, too, when I have better places to offer my company -"

Will believes him, in this. He does. And it does absolutely nothing to ease the strain snapping like too-taut fishing line with every heartbeat that passes between them.

"And the rest of it? Don't bullshit me, Hannibal, you're the one who pushed for this and I wanted it, I did, but – just – fuck," Will snaps, shoving his fingers against the bridge of his nose. His glasses rest skewed atop them, and he forces himself to breathe. "The absences, the sudden changes of plans, not wanting me to touch you – fuck, the buttons on your shirt from getting dressed too fast? It's textbook, Hannibal, it really is."

He holds a hand up when Hannibal draws a breath, eyes closed.

“If you wanted to see me, you would. If you wanted to sleep next to me at night, we would make it work. It’s – Christ, here’s how fucked up this is. I’m not even angry,” Will says, surprised by his own words. “Not about the cheating, anyway. I don’t blame you. It’s – it’s fucking childish to think that me, and this, all this shit I carry, would be enough to satisfy someone. It never has been before, why the hell should it be now? I’m old and pissy and tired. I’m unpleasant to be around. I smell like old glue. I don’t blame you, Hannibal, for wanting something better. Something more than all of this.”

Will tilts his head aside, eyes distant towards the treeline, his jaw set hard and arms wrapped around himself again.

“I just can’t do it, okay?” Will says, and he hates himself because his voice sounds so small. He hates himself for being so weak that he gave into all these thoughts. He hates himself that he can’t just suck it up and take what he can get and be happy with that. “I wish I could, because I do - I did really like you. I do. Fuck, whatever. I wish I could be okay with it but I can’t. I’m sorry.”

Hannibal blinks, and this surprise Will believes too. Perhaps he hadn’t expected Will to catch on as quickly as he had, perhaps he hadn’t expected Will to catch on at all. Perhaps he really hadn’t been seeing anyone and it had been the damn flour but really? How likely was that compared to its resoundingly obvious other possibility?

“Do you really think you are not enough?” Hannibal asks finally, voice softer, very quiet, and Will could scream for it. He wants him angry, he wants him gloating, he wants to be able to stab his finger into thin air once he’s gone and have a reason to hate him, to blame him. “Will, I have not touched anyone since we have -”

“Have what, fucked? Because that was good, that, at least, I’ll believe you if you say it was satisfying. It always was, and god, *god*, I hate that that is something I will genuinely miss in all this mess.”

“I did not cheat, Will, nor have I, and nor do I want to.”

“Cheating is more than a physical romp and sex.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees, setting his hands into a gentle curl against his stomach and moving just a step closer to Will. “It is, and I have not, in any capacity, taken another to replace or supplement you. Will -”

That one step is too much. It’s enough. It brings Hannibal close enough that Will can see the concern darkening his eyes. It brings him close enough that he can feel the tension within the man, not the terse, raised-shoulders defensiveness of being exposed but something else entirely. Similar, but not the same, in the tendon that flickers tighter when Hannibal swallows, it isn’t this, in the way Hannibal’s palms are slightly out-turned as if to bare himself, Will isn’t wrong but he isn’t right –

Will draws a sudden breath, as if emerging from underwater, and lifts his hands to stop Hannibal from coming nearer. He stops, as Will’s eyes taken in every part of him separately and as a whole.

“I believe you,” Will whispers, but his brow furrows deeper and he shakes his head. “I believe that, and I - but - there’s something going on, Hannibal, I know it. I’m not wrong.” His throat clicks as he swallows, and his voice breaks. “Just tell me what it is. Please.”

Hannibal swallows, still surprised that Will could read him so easily, could define a lie so well. It’s remarkable, it’s extraordinary, and yet it brings a panic to Hannibal’s entire being that he has not felt in a long time. This is the first time, perhaps, that he knows he will regret explaining, and all at once knows that he will regret not explaining even more.

“Everyone has secrets.”

“And they always, *always*, come to bite people in the ass, Hannibal.”

“Would you have me bared this way?”

“I want you to be honest with me.”

“And if the truth is more frightening than the imaginings you have already convinced yourself were true?” Hannibal asks him, honest, and - if Will were to look deeper - a little afraid. “If the truth you want so badly is something that would make you never want to see me again?” Hannibal shrugs as Will shakes his head. “Call it very selfish self-preservation, when I do not want to tell someone I very much care for something that would upset them.”

Will considers him, considers his words, does not allow himself to think that maybe he can let it go, just this once, just this one little lie. But he knows that he can’t, he knows that they snowball and grow, lies upon lies upon lies built up in precarious structures with spikes and spines that when toppled rend and stab and hurt much, much more than when they are single little things growing in the dirt.

“I can’t,” Will shrugs, helpless. “I can’t, even knowing it isn’t *that*, just knowing it’s *something*.”

Hannibal says nothing, watches Will with bright eyes and a pleading press of his lips. He says nothing and Will snorts another laugh, entirely humorless and heavy, and turns to go back to his house. Hannibal watches. He pulls open the screen door and Hannibal watches. He manages to hold the dogs back as he opens the front door and with a curse, Hannibal takes the two steps needed to catch the door before it can close.

“Will,” he pleads, one last attempt as the man lifts his eyes to him over the dark rims of his glasses and Hannibal knows, he *knows* that if he lets the door go without a word Will is never going to open it to him again. And to his surprise, to genuine cold terror pooling in his chest, Hannibal relents.

“I killed Tobias Budge.”

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

There's always fucking something.

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by our beloved Noodle!

Will pauses, and then reaches for the door to pull it shut.

"That's not funny. Piss off."

"Will," Hannibal interjects, setting his foot against the door to keep it open. "I'm not trying to be funny. Look at me, please."

With a sigh, Will raises his eyes above his glasses, one hand still on the handle as Hannibal stands wedged between screen and door. The taut line down the side of Hannibal's neck is gone. His jaw is set, and there are shallow furrows above his brow, but no anger or mirth in his expression.

He's being honest.

Will feels an overwhelming urge to call Beverly, and laugh until his lungs burst at all her comments about Will finally finding a nice, normal man. It's never been that easy before - why the fuck should it be now? Sweet-natured, handsome, astoundingly kind, a sharp dresser with a nice home and a flourishing business, a cock to die for and a magician's hands, who truly seems to care about Will despite his iniquities and *he's a murderer*.

Slumping against the door frame, Will shoves his fingers into his eyes so hard he hopes he goes blind.

He is so bad at this.

"Fuck," Will sighs. "You're - you - *fuck*."

"I can explain," Hannibal says gently. "I would like to, if you would let me."

He looks tired, suddenly, in a way that Will understands all too well. It is bone deep and deeper still, it goes beyond little sleep or a busy day, it is an exhaustion that lays over

someone like a shroud, that follows them like a bad smell. Hannibal sighs and rests his head against the door frame, letting his eyes close in a long blink.

"I could use a drink, though, please. If you've any left."

“Practically comes out of the tap at this point,” Will snorts, but Hannibal’s exhaustion settles heavy across his shoulders, weighs them down and presses out the tension that snapped tight moments before. He swallows hard, uncertain what possible explanation there could be that would stop Will from calling the cops.

Will meets the puppy-dog eyes of his murderer boyfriend, and takes a step back to let him into the house.

“You’re not going to - to me, are you?”

This time it is Hannibal who snorts, just as humorless as Will’s had sounded, just as tired, and he shakes his head.

“That particular set of skills I reserve for the obnoxious and depraved.” He smiles when Will gives him a look. “You are neither, and certainly not in regards to human life.”

“I see. You’re an ethical murderer,” Will considers, darkly amused.

He motions towards the chairs, the bed, wherever, the whole room is spinning anyway so Will focuses on his not insignificant stash of whiskey. He chooses a particularly peaty scotch, more expensive than most of the cheap bottles there, because when else is he going to drink it, really? If Hannibal murders people - no, if Hannibal murders obnoxious people - then it’s only a matter of time before he gets fed up with Will, too, and letting good scotch go to waste is an unconscionable crime.

He brings over two glasses, half-full, and the bottle to set between them.

The dogs mill around, tails wagging, happy to see Hannibal again, and the man - despite the tension in him - offers them gentle hands to sniff, runs his fingers through their fur and gives all seven due attention. It’s strangely touching, oddly human, though to be fair Will still doesn’t quite associate “monster” with Hannibal, regardless of his admission.

“You said you’d explain?” Will reminds him, and Hannibal looks up from the crouch he’s in on the floor.

“I said I would like to. I suppose the legitimacy of my explanation will depend on whether or not you see it as truth.”

“Will you lie?”

“No,” Hannibal says. He watches Will as the other takes a drink, presses his lips together to taste the alcohol warm against them. He doesn’t gesture for Hannibal to talk, nothing so magnanimous, but there is a moment when Hannibal knows Will has steeled himself to listen. So he unfolds himself from the floor and moves to join Will where he is sitting. “It is not a

proclivity, nor something I take great pleasure in, but it is something I have done before. To bad people."

Will's breath pulls a little short, but sighs out long. He looks at the man in the chair across from him, whose body he knows but whose mind and heart seem both familiar and strange now. He feels a thin tug of understanding, thinking readily of all the unpleasant people he's ever encountered, their ill-gotten gains gathered only for greed and no mind for those from whom it came.

His fingers frame the glass, and he holds it between his knees.

"How many?"

Hannibal raises his eyes to Will and just watches him. "Six," he finally says. "Including Mr. Budge."

"Jesus."

Hannibal swallows, for a moment says nothing more, then he takes up his glass and deliberately drinks it down fully, lips drawn back at the sting, a small sound hummed in his throat from being unused to the burn of it.

"I read up on him after you mentioned his name. A man with means and no heart. Four times he has donated books to be auctioned for charity events only to pull them at the last minute, once the bids were in the tens of thousands." Hannibal shakes his head gently. "And then you. Genuinely interested in the books he owned, wanting many for your own collection because you knew their worth, you understood - you understand - worth. His cruelty towards you was enough for me, had the other factors not been already."

"Enough to kill him," Will reiterates, in some lingering disbelief that this is really what they're talking about, regardless of whether Budge was a decent person or not.

"Yes."

Budge wasn't a nice man, and Will certainly knows it. There seemed to be no one whose livelihood he wouldn't rend to tatters to meet his own design. But the newspapers that Will shouldn't have read return to mind, black letters and scarlet blood spilling across a white page, and he reaches to the small table between them to refill Hannibal's glass. The liquor shines garnet red where the light strikes it across the table, and Will is keenly and suddenly aware that the only reason Hannibal knows of Budge's name - let alone his misdeeds - is Will's fault.

Will sets the bottle down before his trembling becomes too obvious, retreating to his chair and drawing his feet up into it.

"And the others? The other five."

Hannibal's brows raise a little, not in surprise but in a semblance of a shrug. "One was a man of good means and bad habits. Cruelties and shamelessness in them. He would take the

livelihoods of the elderly in his care and watch them slowly fade away without food or protection until he could inherit his ill-gotten money."

Hannibal brings the glass to his lips but doesn't drink, sets the edge against his bottom lip and closes his eyes to take in the smell of the whiskey instead. Slow breaths, over and over, before he moves the glass away, holding it between his knees as Will holds his own.

"The other four men were responsible for the death of my family," he says quietly, eyes up to Will again. "That, I hope, does not warrant a justification."

There it is. The moment that Will hoped for and dreaded in equal measure, the answer that snips the seams and stays of his heart and lets it beat free and fast once more. A sudden pain twists within his chest and he knows his expression has changed, so he looks down to his glass and shakes his head. It does not warrant justification, and in not warranting it, justifies the rest in turn. Part of Will still begs him to stop listening, part of Will still knows he should call the police, but more of him wants suddenly to lay his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, and kiss the strain from his brow.

"I'm sorry," Will tells him, and he takes another drink.

For a few moments they sit in silence, but for the warm breaths of the dogs around them and the wind against the house. Will cradles his glass tight again, watching it rather than Hannibal, bared and fearful before him. He does not want Hannibal to fear him, and he knows the thought is only half his own. Hannibal does not want Will to fear him, and so mirrored, they let the minutes pull long before Will finally speaks again.

"So that's it," sighs Will, slumping back further into his chair, watching the ceiling. "At least your answer wasn't 'that's how my last relationship ended'."

Hannibal's smile is barely there but it is there enough. He says nothing. Will says nothing. And then slowly, carefully, Hannibal leans forward in his seat and sets his glass to the table.

"My last relationship ended," he says, tone curling in genuine amusement, "when I was told that my perfectionism and lack of desire to experiment would lead me to be inevitably and unforgivably alone for the rest of my life." Hannibal huffs a laugh and shakes his head, one hand up to draw his hair back from his face. "No blood," he adds. "Thought she certainly did leave a lingering bruise in the shape of her hand across my face."

With a grin, Will ducks his head. "You seem experimental enough to me. Cornflakes in a blueberry muffin is a bold choice."

"Not bold enough, apparently," Hannibal answers, his own smile twitching a little wider.

It's easy. It's too easy. Will can hardly think of the man in the context of his confession, committing acts of violence against those who do harm with greed and carelessness. He looks to Hannibal's hands, and imagines them pressed against his cheeks, rather than around his throat. He looks to the man's mouth, and thinks of how softly it curves when he smiles, rather than curling in a snarl. Hannibal is all of those things, as if a transparency of himself were overlaid atop the one that Will knows body and heart.

“My last relationship was a quick tug in a bathroom stall at a book dealer’s convention,” Will remarks with dry amusement. “My last relationship of substance near fucking idolized me. I didn’t end up being who he thought I was, though, and toppling from a pedestal like that hurts everyone involved. Usually the reason is I’m ‘not stable enough’, but that's only when someone actually gets to the point of conversation beyond just ‘do you have a condom’.”

“Are you?” Hannibal asks, head tilted and hands together.

“Unstable?”

“In possession of condoms.”

“I was a Boy Scout,” Will replies, deadpan, and Hannibal bows his head this time to laugh. There is relief between them, perhaps just a release of tension that had lingered and begun to weigh on them. Both are still wary, both are still waiting for more news that will startle or confuse them, both are still waiting for the other to stand up, politely take their leave and go.

Neither do.

Carefully, Hannibal lifts his eyes to Will again, and the younger man makes a sound, soft, as their gazes meet.

“It probably says a lot about me that I’m still sitting here talking to you,” Will considers. “Or it says a lot about you.”

“Both, perhaps.”

Another sound, as Will tilts his glass and takes a sip.

“Will you continue to speak to me?”

The question hurts, and Will lets the pain of it tighten his chest, holding it like a too-fierce embrace around his ribs. He releases it with a breath, small and gentle, and his brows lift beneath his hair. “Will you do it again?”

There’s no ultimatum in it, no challenge or demand. Rather, the question is a surveying of the new terrain between them, revealed by ebbing waters as the floors of their being are bared to the other. He needs to know - for the former detective in him and the new role in which he finds himself with Hannibal - what lays before them, whether the mounts and valleys are surmountable, and how much will be required to surpass them.

Hannibal parts his lips and presses them gently closed again. A hesitation not to lie but to phrase the truth in a way that both of them will understand without the chance for misinterpretation. “I always hope,” he says, “that I will not. I would be happy never to again. But I will not make a promise if there is a chance for it to be broken.”

Not a compulsion, then. Not a drive for bigger, better, *more* that possesses so many once they cross the line of taking a life. An act of duty, perhaps, a purging of some of the wrongs in the world when the world does not correct itself. Will understands the impulse. He can’t help but understand.

“I appreciate the honesty,” Will answers, and there is little more to say than that. The power is in his hands, alone, as to Hannibal’s fate with him and in the world at large. Hannibal has yielded to him, and Will knows intrinsically that Hannibal has not shared it with any others.

And aren’t relationships supposed to be built on trust?

“So the other night,” asks Will, “when you texted to say you couldn’t come over -”

“Waiting on a new oven to replace one that had broken.”

Will feels a smile tug at the corners of his eyes, however faint. “And the shirt. Flour stains?”

A small hum at that, fingers gently splaying in allowance for a white lie there. “Slightly less floury and something a little more viscous,” he admits, leaning to take up his glass as Will tries to fight a smile then too.

“Did you actually hire a new person for the cafe?”

“We did,” Hannibal smiles, bringing the glass to his lips to take another sip. “She starts her training on Monday morning.”

“Under you?”

“This week,” Hannibal agrees. Will raises an eyebrow.

“And next?”

“I was hoping you would continue your trend of working from home, and I could invite myself over to make you breakfast.”

“It’s rude to invite yourself over,” Will points out, motioning with his glass towards the man. When Hannibal lifts a brow, Will allows a crooked smile. “And unnecessary, since you’re already welcome here.”

He realizes the repercussions of the words only after he says them, but makes no correction.

Fuck it.

There’s always something with relationships, and the discovery of whatever that *something* is - cheating, mutual disdain, one-sided displeasure - typically hits a pitch where it ends the interest for both sides. Will takes a moment to remind himself that he’s not excusing an unfortunate tendency to chew with one’s mouth open, and he’s in fact now an accomplice to murder. Then he wonders at the fact that he has to remind himself of this, because his foremost thoughts are lingering instead on the thought of Hannibal being able to share mornings with him again.

Fuck it.

Just fuck it.

Fuck Tobias Budge and his books. Fuck the other asshole, too, whose name Will doesn't know nor does he have any desire to know. Fuck the men who killed Hannibal's family, a thought that stabs cold into the pit of Will's belly. In fact, fuck them twice in fact for driving such a gentle man to such atrocities.

"Can I ask another question?"

"You just have," Hannibal points out with tired amusement. Will snorts. "Anything you like, or need."

Will chews his lip in thought. "I've been reading the papers about Budge. I shouldn't, but I have been. It's not every goddamn day - thank fuck - that an acquaintance gets, y'know. Murdered." Keen eyes settle on Hannibal, a detective's innate curiosity narrowing them. "What did you do with the trophies? They said there were organs not found at the scene."

Hannibal regards him carefully before blinking and dropping his eyes to his glass. Gently, he swirls the liquid within, amber and warm, and considers his answer. He could answer bluntly, have Will regard him and pale, and perhaps reconsider his carte blanche invitation. He could skirt around the answer, have Will's eyes narrow, have his displeasure entirely evident at being lied to, even if by omission only.

He could.

He decides on something in between.

"There is a reason I rarely serve beef or lamb, pate or kidney pie, to you or my clients." Hannibal's lips work gently and he finishes the rest of his drink with a pensive hum. "It is my own personal vendetta, to take them, and to utilize them."

Will blinks. His lips part but for a moment there is no sound, or breath to fuel one. The last missing piece clicks neatly into place and Will surveys the work as a whole laid before him. He eats them. He kills them, takes his prize, and fucking eats them.

There's always fucking something.

"Christ," Will finally says. He sucks down the rest of his scotch all at once, too fast for it to even hit his tongue, and grimaces when it burns down his throat. "I guess I owe you even more thanks for all the dinner, then. I thought you were just a health nut. No red meat."

Hannibal breathes out a laugh. "Rarely," he agrees.

"And done rare?" Will's expression is entirely clear, entirely pleased, and slowly, gently, he allows a smile to tilt his lips up.

Hannibal just looks at him, dumbfounded, awestruck, delighted, *relieved*. And so ridiculously, embarrassingly, hilariously turned on. He sets his glass to the table, the click of it almost too loud between them, and pushes himself to stand. Already the room is not quite steady. Not enough to overbalance him or for it to be genuine inebriation but enough for the lightheadedness to feel pleasant.

Hannibal takes the two steps around the table, another to stand directly in front of Will, and slowly, deliberately bends over him to set his hands on either side of Will, on the arms of the chair.

“I very much want to kiss you right now,” he murmurs, close enough that both have to blink to keep the other in focus. He can feel Will’s breath whiskey-sweet and warm against his face and parts his lips before biting the bottom one. “Very much.”

“Sudden craving for tongue?” Will mutters, and then he can make only a sound when Hannibal’s lips close over his own.

Will holds his glass between his knees, and raises his hands to rest on Hannibal’s arms. Strong and safe, protective and fond. He cares, he cares deeply, enough to ensure that Will remembers to eat and sleep, enough to seek him out and withstand the assault of Will’s personality, enough to remove - permanently - a source of distress from his life. It should bother him more, but as their mouths twist warmly together, tasting of heat and sweetness, Will can’t be troubled to force the feelings that for whatever reason, have not come already.

His fingers skim higher, over pressed shirtsleeves, to rest above the collar of his shirt. Framing Hannibal’s neck, his jaw, his cheeks, Will leans back in the chair and brings Hannibal further over him, relenting to the insistence of Hannibal’s tongue past his lips. He arches upward, as if to lose himself in the man’s kiss entirely, and feel himself swallowed whole by it.

The thought makes Will laugh, sudden and terrible and bright, and when Hannibal regards him with gentle, curious amusement, Will runs his thumb across Hannibal’s lips.

“No more questions,” he murmurs. “Just take me to bed.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

He wants to keep him.

He wants to keep this.

And what's a little murder compared to that?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The bed is reached with both of them partially dressed. Hannibal's shirt twists askew against his sharp collarbones and off one shoulder, just one button still holding it onto his body at all. Will's pants are down his thighs, Hannibal's hands already in his briefs and stroking him up as Will leaves marks against his arms where Hannibal holds him.

Hannibal sits down on the bed first, hands slipping from Will's cock and around to cup his ass and yank him closer, laughing when Will curses. He whispers the same curse back before kissing him soundly and lying back on the mattress so Will can kick off his pants and work on undoing Hannibal's belt to divest him of his pants as well.

Objectively, Will knows that this is Bad. It is Wrong. Having sex with murderers is a Thing That Shouldn't Be Done but Will isn't sure if there are allowances made when those murderers are also deeply charming, compassionate gentlemen, or when the murderer in question also happens to be one's boyfriend, in one's longest and healthiest relationship to date. It seems as though saying absolutely, and without exception, *never have sex with a murderer* could exclude a great number of people thrust into that role by circumstance or nature outside of their control.

And that's not very fair at all. No more fair than saying *never have sex with unstable people* or *never have sex with jerks*, both of which would certainly have seen the end of Will Graham's meager sex life.

A rough hand in his hair bends his head back and bares his throat, drawing his attention back by gentle force. Will swallows, and Hannibal watches the movement as Will jerks Hannibal's belt free from him and throws it to the floor with a clatter.

"Fuck," Will sighs, forcing Hannibal's pants down past his hips. It's enough to free the man's cock - siren of Will's dreams, distractor of his thoughts - the thick line of it trapped within his briefs. Will's jaw aches with want for it but instead he climbs higher. He straddles Hannibal's hips in a clumsy, drunken sprawl and rubs down against him with a groan, head bowed.

Hannibal's fingers seek down from Will's hair to his back, drawing his knuckles down his spine, splaying his palms hot over each of Will's sides in a way that is both possessive and protective and entirely too good. Then his fingers curl, and with a deliberate tug, Hannibal has Will's shirt up his back and over his head and on the floor on top of his belt.

"God, look at you," Hannibal moans, arching his neck to kiss Will again, to catch his jaw when the other turns away with a laugh, seeking Hannibal's pulse with his lips in turn. Hannibal wonders how Will could have ever thought that Hannibal would be uninterested, how he could ever have thought that he was bored and wanted to leave, to cheat, to disappear.

Never.

Not for as long as Will allows the closeness and cuddling, the kisses and fucking.

"I would not give you up for the world, you surly bastard," he tells him.

"*Your* surly bastard now," Will threatens him, grinning as he's held in place and pursued into another kiss.

He twists and squirms, an aimless stroppy writhing to escape, to be close, to be apart, to shove their bodies together. Every gyration sends their hips into contact, their cocks rubbing friction and damp fabric against the other. He struggles, but not really, just to feel Hannibal's grip tighten around his ribs, his waist, his hips, finally, rocking Will against himself.

Will throws himself forward, then, heavy over Hannibal, driving their mouths together. He makes a complaining sound when Hannibal snares arms around his middle and squeezes, he kisses him harder, nipping his lower lip for the trouble. The room spins less when Hannibal is this close, and to the contrary of so many past complaints, Will feels stable pressed against Hannibal.

He wants to keep him.

He wants to keep this.

And what's a little murder compared to that?

"Fuck me," Will whispers. "Please, I need - I want - it and you, inside me, all of you -"

Hannibal's hands find Will's ass again and squeeze, hard, enough for Will to curse and moan against him again, enough for his entire body to shiver in pleasure as Hannibal spreads him. The fabric of his underwear still covers him when clever fingers seek to rub over his hole and tease more clear fluid from Will's cock.

Hannibal laughs, a curt and pleased thing, when the last button holding his shirt to his chest is popped off and bounces over the hardwood floor to somewhere he will never find it. He doesn't care. He does not care. He works his arms out of the sleeves and arches for Will to pull his briefs off of his legs as well, baring him before he can bare Will, Will's hands quick to grasp his cock and stroke him.

With a low moan, Hannibal relents, and for a moment merely lays back and allows the pleasure to pool at the base of his belly, allows his knees to draw up and thighs spread as Will touches him, seeks down between his legs to play with his balls and press his fingertips against his perineum.

When he reaches for Will again it is to hook his hands behind his thighs and yank him close, almost bending Will in half the way he sits. He kisses him, hard enough to pull a sound of something like protest from the younger man before slipping one leg straight against the bed and pushing up with the other and pinning Will to the bed beneath him. He pulls his briefs down and away, one foot still caught in the garment as Hannibal spreads Will's legs wide and tilts him up enough to bury his face between his thighs and push sucking kisses against his hole.

"Fucking Christ," Will groans, shoving a hand across his face, unseating his glasses. He plucks them off and tosses them to floor, pushing his hand up through his hair to squeeze and pull as Hannibal's tongue drives into his opening. Will arches from the bed, up onto his toes, wanting everything the older man has to offer him, taking him as he is. Physically, emotionally, fuck it, Will wants him in every way he can have him.

As for everything else, well…

They'll figure it out.

"Harder," Will demands. He sucks his lower lip between his teeth, bites it enough to hurt, releasing it damp with a low moan when Hannibal sucks so hard against that tight ring of muscle that Will swears he'll turn him inside out.

But that's all he gets, as Hannibal's breath cools wet skin, teasing as he withdraws just to hear Will curse and feel him squirm frantic for more. He lifts a leg onto Hannibal's shoulders, curling it around the back of his head to pull him in close again, and spitting foul oaths when Hannibal resists with a laugh.

"You're going to be the fucking death of me," mutters Will, and the very literal potential truth of it rips a rough laugh from him in turn.

As though in reprimand, Hannibal bites against his thigh, just enough to sting, just enough to have Will jerk with another laugh against him. Hannibal crawls further up his wriggling body and displaces his leg to rest in the crook of his elbow as he ducks his head to suck against a hard little nipple.

He adores Will, adores him. The way he struggles, always, against him every time they play, the way he pretends to hate the special attention at the cafe, the delivered coffee to his shop, the kisses and cuddling and lazy morning sex when either one of them stays over. Hannibal loves to please, he loves the satisfaction of pleasing, he loves the tug against his chest when he knows he hasn't quite succeeded and has to work harder.

Will makes him work harder.

Will gives as good as he gets and leaves marks and bruises and hickeys against Hannibal that he touches when they're apart, and remembers.

Hannibal groans as Will tugs his hair and lifts his head to look at him, eyes hooded and expression pleased, before reaching past Will, accepting the harsh kiss he gets for his trouble, to get the lube and condoms from the drawer in the bedside table.

Will waits until he hears the rustle of the little wrapper, and reaching, snares it from Hannibal's fingers to send it skittering across the floor to join the rest of their passionate detritus. Hannibal blinks, and looks back to Will, who kisses him without another word.

If he's going to live dangerously, sucking the tongue of an admitted cannibal between his lips, then he's going to love dangerously, too.

Fuck it.

He grabs the lube, cracking it open one handed and squeezing it copiously into his palm. He smears it between both hands and dips them between their bodies, between Hannibal's legs, watching with hooded eyes the pleasure that washes over Hannibal's face. Will strokes his cock with both hands, wrapped firm around the thick girth of it, fingers playing across the swollen head hot beneath his touch. One hand pulls away, to push between his own legs instead, fingering himself with a moan to smear the viscous fluid over his opening.

Hannibal can barely take his eyes off of him, beautiful and spread beneath him, flushed from cheeks to chest, muscles taut, thighs trembling. Will is a man Hannibal had never thought he would be allowed to have. Someone clever and snarky and human, someone who so genuinely enjoys a good fucking, as much as he enjoys sucking and being sucked. Will is an entirely sexual being, and Hannibal cannot believe how lucky he is to have him.

"Stop," he sighs, breathing hot against Will's face as the other looks up briefly and kisses him, hand slipping away to smear the remains of the slick against his thigh. "Spread your legs more."

Hannibal feels Will's moan when he sucks a bruise against his throat, feels his pulse skitter and speed up beneath his lips and teeth. He grasps Will's ankles to spread him wider, not because Will's own motions were not enough but because he knows, can feel, how much Will loves when he is handled that way. Hannibal holds him spread and lines up, rocking teasingly against Will's opening until both are panting, until Will is cursing and gasping Hannibal's name.

And then he pushes in.

He doesn't pause or yield, nor does he force. It is a slow and steady drive that finds Will's breath pushed from inside him into gasping whimpers, scrabbling fingers snaring sharp nails into Hannibal's back as he is spread, widened, filled and taken. Will tries to shift, to squeeze Hannibal with his legs, but instead finds himself held further, ankles in the air, legs wide, and cock spilling clear fluid across his trembling belly.

Exposed, bared, Will's cheeks turn scarlet beneath Hannibal's studious surveying. He watches with unabashed interest as Will's body opens for him, as his thick cock disappears within, as Will's breath returns in jagged gasps that heave his sides. Will does not tell him to stop, he wouldn't, not when the rawness and the ache of it satisfies him beyond comprehension, and the afterburn of stars fill his vision when he blinks.

"So fucking big," Will purrs, his voice a coarse, rough thing. He tries to twist further up the bed, but Hannibal holds him fast. He tries to force his ass down harder on Hannibal's cock, and only then the man slows himself. Finally Will just laughs, helpless and weak and intoxicated on scotch and sex, as the stiff curls of Hannibal's pubic hair tickles his entrance.

"Pompous prick," Will adds, lips curling in a grin.

"*Your* pompous prick, now," Hannibal reminds him, parting his lips to bite gently against Will's chin, moving down to his throat next. He arches his back and pulls out of him, slow enough to make Will groan, to tilt his head back and have his hands dig sharp into Hannibal's back before he thrusts back in.

"Fuck."

"Yes." Hannibal lets him go long enough to frame Will's face in his hands and press him to the bed with another kiss, deep enough to have them both breathless, hard enough to swallow the sound Will makes when Hannibal starts a steady rhythm against him, deep and slow and hard.

Will would never admit to the sound he makes, as a near-forty year-old man, as someone mostly in control of his own faculties, as someone who definitively does not *whimper*. But that's exactly what it is, pressed into Hannibal's shoulder where Will sets his teeth. That's exactly what Hannibal makes him do, filling Will up and spreading him wide, with nothing to lessen the sensation of skin against skin where they're joined in cruelly languid thrusts that Will can feel all the way to his stomach.

Hannibal does this to him. Hannibal makes him weak, he makes him gentle. He makes Will feel small and overpowered and he makes him feel important and worthy. Hannibal makes him feel whole, from the capable way that Will can take Hannibal's body into his to the fulfillment deeper still that spreads warm through him every morning that they wake together.

And from all that Hannibal has said, Will knows that he - somehow, of all fucking people - makes Hannibal feel the same.

"Christ," Will whispers, tightening his arms around Hannibal's neck. He clings to him, holds to him, he doesn't want to let him go and he doesn't want Hannibal to ever stop. Nuzzling the older man's neck, Will parts his lips over his pulse and whispers, softly, so softly that between the movement of their skin together, he can hardly be heard:

"I don't want you to leave, Hannibal."

It is Hannibal, this time, who whimpers. Slowing enough that his lips just brush against Will's skin, drawing soft over the sweat pooled at the base of his neck, in the curve of his

clavicle. He sighs, pants, moans against him, drawing his hands over Will's skin, down his face and over his shoulders, to his elbows, down his sides and lower still to hold Will's hips as he leans up to kiss him again.

"Not until you make me go," Hannibal promises him, pressing their foreheads together as he speeds up again, so close already, and Will clawing at him, drawing his knees up around him, hooking his ankles up around his back. "And even then I will stubbornly argue."

"Rude," Will laughs.

"Obnoxiously."

"Perfectly," Will answers, his sighed word tilting into a groan as Hannibal buries himself hard enough to make the bed shake. Will's entire body tightens around him, and he grins, tilting his nose along the length of Hannibal's neck. "Mostly."

It's as near a thing as Will could ever hope to find, and true for them both.

Almost perfect.

"Harder," begs Will again, his legs squeezing tight against sharp hips, no longer bucking against Hannibal's cock but simply letting himself be taken, and clinging to the man with every muscle. Heat rises from his belly, it spills from him across his stomach and still Hannibal does not stop the fierce, fond fucking that drives Will into the mattress. Pleasure ripples beneath Will's skin as he moans, come smearing slick between them, and in an unsteady voice, he insists, "Inside me, Hannibal, inside -"

A hand snares in Will's hair and tugs his curls straight, Hannibal arching over him like a creature, like a beautiful thing, lips parted and breath shaking against Will's wet skin. It takes several thrusts more before he's coming, pushed deep into Will and whispering his name against him like a prayer.

They rest together panting, sweaty and slicked sticky together, Hannibal's forehead pressing to Will's chest, Will's fingers in Hannibal's hair, just stroking the straight strands from his face as both allow their hearts to slow and their minds to ease. Hannibal moves only enough to pull out of Will, despite the whine it elicits, and to reach for his pants on the floor to find his phone.

"Are you fucking kidding?" Will's laugh purrs through him, vibrates through his bones and warms his chest as Hannibal rests back against him, nuzzling against his heartbeat.

"It is the first time in the history of this cafe," Hannibal mumbles against him, "that I am calling in sick." Hannibal curls his hand around Will's middle and holds him closer. "You will allow me this one rudeness, if you please."

"Will I?"

Hannibal dials the number of one of his employees, eyes barely open even as he turns them to Will, before pressing the phone to his ear.

“You will,” he replies. And Will kisses him.

There really isn’t any choice.

Will didn’t sleep last night. No, he thinks, that’s not entirely correct. He did sleep for several fleeting hours between far-too-fucking-late and far-too-fucking-early, before the dogs woke him demanding their breakfast and Will’s phone wouldn’t stop fucking vibrating and next thing he knew he was spread across his stomach in bed furtively typing back answers. In the hours before morning’s chaos, though, and in the hours before he slept wrapped in firm arms, his nose tucked against a furry chest, Will had been held by his wrists and given such a thorough fucking that it almost felt like a scolding.

He had come so hard he was shaking afterward, and couldn’t stop laughing.

Hannibal told him he was beautiful, and Will told him to shut up.

And then they slept, and then came the dogs and the sun and the relentless emails, and coffee was left on the nightstand. But in spending far too long in the shower investigating just how wide Hannibal had left him, with probing fingers and muttered curses and a weak spatter of white against the shower floor, Will didn’t leave enough time to make more coffee to bring with him to work.

So there really isn’t any choice.

What a shame.

The bell above the door tinkles too lightly to mask Will’s groan at the length of the line. Stretched far enough now that Will lingers with the door open, he glances towards the little table set by the window, yet empty despite the morning rush. Will makes his way there, head ducked and shoulders hunched inside his oversized coat, and he drops his bag to the table with a dull thud.

Reserved reads the neat, coiling script written on the folded sign. Will sits slowly, with an easily suppressed smile as a sharp reminder of the night before makes him flinch.

Few people pay him mind. Some frown, unsure if he is simply ignoring the sign or if it is really his own. It hardly matters, they would frown anyway. After the reviews, the cafe had taken off more than Hannibal and his small crew could handle. More people work there now, and despite Hannibal’s insistence on being there every morning, he finds himself quite happy to spend his afternoons in a dusty bookstore or surrounded by seven gently whining dogs.

Will is back on his phone again before he even realizes, wrapped up in an ongoing dick-waving contest over a true first *Casino Royale*, black-cloth and octavo-bound, and with a dust-cover so untanned it looks shelf-new. He considers his options, thumbing across the screen. He considers the asshole whose name fills his screen. He considers Hannibal, as an option for remediation.

He chews his lip until finally his conscience wins out, but it's always nice to have alternatives.

And the line moves on past him, more and more people join, voices lowered to a soft murmuring, and they're served promptly by whoever is running the machine this morning. Will lets the atmosphere lull him to calm again, shifting periodically in his seat and feeling his cheeks warm with the knowledge of *why* it hurts to sit and the knowledge of *more this evening*.

"Mr. Graham?"

He glances up when his name is called again, his not-yet-caffeinated brain piecing together that those words mean his name, and Will frowns gently at the girl behind the counter. She's new, he thinks. Or she could be the girl who has worked there since he had first come in. He's not good with faces.

"Mr. Graham, your coffee is ready at counter."

Will parts his lips with his tongue and sighs, agonized. He looks between the girl and the line, the counter and his table, and considers for a moment asking why the hell they can't just bring it over. In a rare moment of restraint, he resists the impulse, and shoves his seat out with a squeaky, shrill grind of chair legs against the floor.

He winds through tables, past would-be writers hunched over their little notebooks, past people engaged in conversation far too loud and chipper for this goddamn early in the day. A glance back towards his things assures him that they're fine, and he sets his hands against the counter.

"Where?"

The barista lifts a brow at the growled demand, but quirks a smile when she nods just over her shoulder.

Will looks, makes a show of pretending reluctance at such a simple request. He can see Hannibal moving in the kitchen, shirt sleeves folded up - always folded, never shoved - to bare his strong arms as he works. Will knows the top button will be undone but not the second, because that would reveal the bite mark Will had left on him two nights ago that had pulled Hannibal's orgasm from him with shuddering intensity.

He curls his lip gently between his teeth and sighs, as Hannibal turns from his work and makes his way to the counter, snagging up a steaming cup of something undoubtedly exceptional from one of the immaculate steel tables.

"Mr. Graham." Hannibal sets the coffee down just out of reach, rests his hands on the counter and watches Will as the barista makes her way around him to start on another coffee order. "I'm afraid in this economy I can hardly provide you with free coffee every morning, so I have imposed a tax upon it."

Will blinks, shoulders tense already because everyone - *everyone* - in the fucking line is watching now, and Hannibal's expression is so damn calm, and fuck, his bottom lip is still a little red from where Will had sucked it that morning, Jesus.

"A tax?"

"A tax," Hannibal repeats, finally allowing a smile as he tilts his head and leans closer still, elbows to the counter now and hands gently clasped. "A kiss."

"Fuck you," Will murmurs, cheeks scarlet and smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"That might earn you a pastry, too."

With a sigh, Will presses his weight onto his hands, splayed against the counter, then leans back onto his heels, shifting uneasily beneath the weighty gazes of all the assholes in line now visibly dismayed that they, too, don't get special side-orders and their own table. All the assholes who are now looking, in that peripheral way that one watches without watching directly, as Hannibal leans just an inch closer.

Will grabs for his coffee but the hand against his wrist is faster, the fingers stronger that twine with his, and Will lets out a desperate laugh.

"You're holding my coffee hostage."

"If the tax is too much -"

"Christ, shut up," Will sighs, before leaning up onto his toes, across the counter, and holding Hannibal's lips beneath his own with a helpless whimper.

Hannibal kisses him with a smile, eyes closed and gently wrinkling at the corners when a few of the people waiting whistle or clap. He knows Will will hate it. He also knows that once the rush dies down Will is going to pin him to the frigid wall of the walk-in and suck him so hard Hannibal will wonder if he will ever be able to breathe again.

He squeezes their fingers together and draws his nose alongside Will's when they break apart.

"Chicory to start you off," he whispers. "Then breakfast, and then you must get to work."

"Just one?"

"No, you will take another coffee with you," Hannibal assures him, and with his free hand releases Will's first drink to him across the counter, though he does not release his hand. "I have to go back," he apologizes.

The words tug at Will, even though he knows that Hannibal is only going back to the kitchen, even though he knows he'll get to sit and watch him in his element - graceful and skilled - for a while longer. Even though he knows Hannibal will come by the shop later with lunch and then they'll be home for dinner at one house or the other. Even though it's been months and months since Will first staggered into the cafe.

Even though Will is supposed to be a surly bastard.

Even though Hannibal is supposed to be a pretentious prick.

Exceptions on exceptions on exceptions and still, Will's heart hurts wonderfully at the words.

"I'll miss you," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles at him, that open, warm look that makes Will's heart do contortion acts against his ribcage. A warm thumb, rough with work, draws over Will's knuckles before Hannibal brings Will's hand to his lips to kiss them instead.

"Shut up," he tells him fondly, and lets Will go.

Chapter End Notes

All the love in the world to our beloved beta Noodle, without whom we could not provide stories to you in nearly so quick a turnaround. All the cuddles in the world to trythisoutchiki for the delightful idea and encouraging words!

We're so surprised and delighted by the love this series has gotten, and can't thank you all enough for reading along through all the coffee, books, and murder fluff. Thank you always!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!